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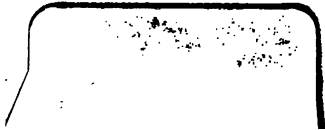
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MARCHMONT:

A NOVEL.

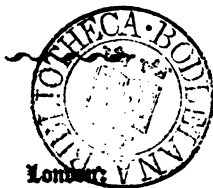


BY CHARLOTTE SMITH.



IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and techniques used to collect and analyze data. It highlights the need for consistent and reliable data sources to support the findings of the study.

3. The third part of the document presents the results of the analysis, showing the trends and patterns observed in the data. It includes detailed tables and graphs to illustrate the key findings.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the implications of the findings and provides recommendations for future research and practice. It suggests that further studies should be conducted to explore the underlying causes of the observed trends.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes the study and summarizes the main points. It reiterates the importance of accurate record-keeping and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of financial performance.

MARCHMONT.

CHAPTER I.

..... His poor self,
A dedicated beggar to the air!
Walks, like Contempt, alone.

WHILE his daughter was gradually accustoming herself to the dreary solitude to which he had condemned her, and even learning to take in it an interest that he little suspected could ever arise, Sir Audley Dacres, amidst the busy scenes of political life in which he was now more deeply than ever engaged,

had still leisure to feel uneasiness from the consciousness of having acted wrong. His desire of gratifying Lady Dacres, even in a point which certainly did not raise her character in his esteem; his long-established habits of making himself obeyed; and the various advantages which his ambition continually represented as attending on an alliance with Mr. Mohun—advantages that seemed to justify whatever means he had taken to bring it about—all were considerations insufficient to silence entirely those reproaches which his conscience was so impertinent as to make on the subject of Althea.—It was in vain that his wife (who failed not to perceive his uneasiness) endeavoured, by the most artful methods, to persuade him, that almost any other father, under similar circumstances, would have acted more rigorously. Sir Audley, though he affected to acquiesce, and said hardly any thing on the subject, felt his disquiet continually

tinually increase; and amidst the drudgery of party cabals, in which he was deeply engaged, and which required the constant vigilance of those who were admitted to them, he began seriously to consider, if, without bringing his eldest daughter into the house of her step-mother, which he knew would embitter his life with continual feuds, he could find no properer situation for her than a deserted mansion on the confines of Devonshire; no society more eligible than that of his own discarded servants.

This, however, on a nearer view, was less easily found than might be imagined. There were houses of reputation in London, where young women are received who have no proper home; but he knew the expence would be a great objection with Lady Dacres, who must besides, in submitting to such a measure, feel it to be a tacit acknowledgement that she would not admit and protect the daughter of her husband.

band.—Of Althea's own family, there was not one who was likely, or proper, to afford her an asylum—nor did he know, among all the women of his acquaintance who might have been glad to have received her as a temporary visitor, any to whom he could be thoroughly satisfied to entrust her.—She had now been more than a month at Eastwoodleigh; and so far from her banishment having effected what he hoped from it, a change of sentiments in favour of Mohun, her last letters had borne a greater appearance of cheerful resignation than the first. If then, during this dead and dreary month, her resolution had resisted the sadness of such perfect seclusion, there was but little probability that it would fail, when the return of spring should give her the liberty of pursuing those innocent pleasures for which he knew she had acquired a taste, from her education and habits of life.—To insist therefore on her

her continuing there, did not seem likely to answer the end he proposed; but while he wished to relinquish a plan which he could not but consider as cruel and unwarrantable, he did not believe that the removal of his daughter to those scenes where she ought to appear would by any means accelerate his views in regard to Mohun. He knew that wherever she was seen she could hardly fail of exciting general admiration; and he did not think that the preference of others was likely, in the opinion of Althea, to give value to that of Mohun. But Sir Audley, half disposed to relinquish a plan so little likely to be effected, believed that were Althea to appear in public, attended with those advantages which other young women enjoyed, she could not fail of being advantageously married, notwithstanding the smallness of her fortune; and such an event was surely the most desirable both for Lady Dacres and himself.

Some degree of personal indisposition added to the painful regret with which he sometimes thought of his harsh conduct towards Althea. His views, like those of all ambitious men, opening as he ascended, were yet often overclouded and disappointed. The friendships of politicians he found, above all other reliances, fallacious, and he frequently found himself disappointed and supplanted by the creatures he had himself placed in the way of favour.

The base traffic of his conscience and his understanding against the hopes of a larger income, or a more eminent post, had not hitherto paid him as he expected; and some late instances of the imperious and overbearing temper of Mohun had internally disgusted him, though they were apparently more closely united than ever.

But however frequently his mind adverted to the subject of Althea, he could find no place of residence which would
be

be at once eligible for her, and without objection on the part of Lady Dacres.— While he considered and re-considered the matter, time wore away. His sons, who were his greatest objects, came home for the Christmas recess, and, with the eldest, such a report from the master of the public school where he had been placed, that, though it was conveyed in terms the most considerate, Sir Audley was convinced an instant removal from thence was necessary; and his thoughts were immediately engrossed with so important a debate as of course followed, in regard to what was to be done with a boy so difficult to govern, and so conscious of his own consequence.—Sir Audley was inclined to the University; but Lady Dacres remarking that the sons of some of her acquaintance, who had been there, had turned out extremely ill, and that in the diplomatic line, for which Mr. Dacres was designed, an university education was by no means

necessary ; it was at length, after much hesitation and debate, determined, that this eldest hope of his family should make the tour of Italy and Germany, since that of France could not now be included ; and that he should forthwith be provided with a tutor versed in foreign languages, and proceed in about six weeks on his travels.

These deliberations, and some discoveries of his son's disposition, which forced themselves upon his observation, however he wished not to see them, so entirely occupied his mind, that Althea was almost forgotten.—and the time he could spare from his political engagements was wholly given to repress the excesses of this young man, and to the discovery of some proper person to whom he could be entrusted when no longer under parental authority.

During the course of this enquiry, it happened, by the means of Lady Barbara Newmarch, to reach the knowledge of

one

one of those women in a certain rank of life, who with some literature, and much pretence, acquire a sort of authority in such matters; ladies, who have *conversations* instead of routs and assemblies, and who, without making too strict a scrutiny into their motives, may often be allowed the praise of doing some good, by their occasional patronage of obscure merit; though doubts have arisen whether they may not occasionally have done harm, in teaching those to fancy themselves people of genius, who had only assurance, and some powers of imitation.

Be that as it may, Mrs. Gilborough, the lady now in question, having heard of Sir Audley's enquiry after a young man well educated as tutor to Mr. Dactes, lost no time in entreating Lady Barbara to endeavour to keep the appointment open till a gentleman could be written to; who, she was sure, would be unexceptionable.—Sir Audley readily

dily promised the delay of a few days—
and then the following letters passed between him and Mrs. Giffborough :

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Assured of your strong adherence to those principles which have always distinguished *our* families, and which your present highly respectable connections do so much honour to, I am free to believe that the young gentleman whom I have to mention to you cannot fail of being approved, he owing the decline of his family's fortune to the attachment of his ancestors to the Royal cause in the trying period of 1640, &c. and since they have, with less power, always been a very loyal family, though it has happened that their fortune has, from various causes, declined. The young gentleman, on whose behalf I write, is called Marchmont, and is the last of that ancient family. I am assured, and I believe from my own observations,

tions, that he is very well qualified for the undertaking, to which I beg leave to recommend him. I am told that his morals are irreproachable. He speaks the French language perfectly, having resided some years in France (where he has respectable connections), and has a competent knowledge of the Italian and German—a good taste in the polite arts; and, in a word, I am taught to believe, that on farther enquiry you would find Mr. Marchmont eminently qualified to attend your son. I shall be happy in being instrumental in procuring him so honourable and fortunate an engagement; and have the honour to be,

“ With the greatest respect,

“ Sir,

“ Your most obedient humble servant,

“ A. GISBOROUGH.

“ Welbeck-Street,
Jan. 17th.”

To this Sir Audley returned, with very little hesitation, the following answer:

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“ MADAM,

“MADAM,

“You do at once justice to my principles, and to those sentiments which would render it extremely agreeable to me to obey the commands with which you have honoured me. It therefore gives me very great concern, that it is not in my power to engage the gentleman you mention as a tutor to Mr. Dacres. I believe he may be very deserving; but circumstances, which it is not necessary to recapitulate, make his reception into *my* family impracticable. Be assured, Madam; only the most insuperable objections could weigh against the lively inclination I feel to pay deference to your recommendation, which confers a great obligation on us all.—I have the honour to be, with the highest esteem and regard, Madam,

“Your most obliged, and

“Most faithful humble servant,

“AUDLEY DACRES.

“Upper Grosvenor Street,

Jan. 20th.”

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Thus,

Thus, without assigning any reason, because he was conscious that he could not give the true one, he put an end to this solicitation on behalf of a young man who had in reality no other fault than that of being poor—though, with Sir Audley, he had undoubtedly another.—It had been surmised, that the father of Lady Daeres, who was one of that race of beings which, were the rich ever called by their true names, would have been denominated an *usurer*, had taken, by means of an attorney who was entrusted to transact his business, some very unfair advantages of the necessities of the elder Marchmont; and that the estates, of which Sir Audley had become possessed in consequence of that transaction were by no means so honestly come by, or so clear in the title by which he held them, as a very scrupulous man might have wished. Young Marchmont, who dreaded the distress of his mother and his sisters, but was

was indifferent to his own, had never appeared conscious of this unfair dealing, but had, on the contrary, endeavoured to conciliate Sir Audley, that he might leave the family a little longer in possession of their house in Surry; but Sir Audley, notwithstanding he had not himself been the instrument, felt, in enjoying the fruit of iniquity, that he hated the person injured as much as if he had himself been the aggressor.—Strange! that the consciousness of having injured, or participated in an injury, should create, in the human mind, so much malignity against the sufferer! Yet so it always is.

Sir Audley, however, by no means allowed, even in arguing the matter with himself, that Marchmont had any cause of complaint—and he disliked him, not only for this latent reason, which, though he repelled it, lurked in his mind, but because, though poor, he seemed to consider himself still in his former rank,
and

and even when asking a favour, (as he did when he solicited his mother's continuance in the Surry house) it was less like a dependant than an equal. Sir Audley, accustomed since he had lived among place-men to a very different conduct from those who had any thing to ask, could not reconcile himself to this manly bearing; and between one cause of dislike and another he hated Marchmont heartily—and never spoke of him but in terms of contempt and displeasure.

But the consequence of this repulse was much more material to Marchmont than merely the loss of an appointment, which, had he known it was with a son of Sir Audley's, he would not have solicited, or, had it been procured, have accepted; it deprived him of every hope of success in his pursuit of a tutorship—for Mrs. Gisborough, who, together with some of her friends, had undertaken to befriend him, and who were very likely

to

to succeed, no sooner canvassed Sir Audley's letter than they concluded that their zeal was misplaced; and that something was undoubtedly wrong in the character of this young man, of which Sir Audley was too generous to speak, yet which was undoubtedly of a nature that rendered it impossible for them to hazard committing themselves by recommending him.—When therefore he came from an obscure lodging in Surry, where he lived with his mother and sisters, to know the event of an application which Mrs. Gisborough had informed him she had made, without telling him to whom, he was met by a very cold letter from that lady, who, without seeing him, contented herself with that method of letting him know, “That her application had failed, and that she was sorry to say she believed it would not be in her power; or that of the friends to whom she had spoken, to serve him in the way they had hoped.”

Marchmont.

Marchmont wanted not discernment to see that this was only a civil way of the lady's relieving herself from all farther trouble; he returned dejected to his family, to whom, however, he made light of his disappointment, that he might not inflict new anguish on the half-broken heart of his mother.

But when he sat down seriously to consider his situation, this disappointment, which followed so many others, fell cold and heavy on his spirits. The creditors had threatened to arrest the remains of his father as they were proceeding towards the parish church of Eastwoodleigh; and Marchmont, in the agony of his mind, had entered into personal engagements to ward off so cruel a blow: subsequent discoveries of the condition of his father's affairs had rendered it impossible for him ever to acquit himself of these engagements from the effects that were left. Nothing therefore remained for him but to attempt,

tempt, by some exertions of his own, to satisfy the inexorable men to whom he was now personally bound; and who, provoked by their losses, declared their resolution to imprison him, unless some prospect opened which might enable him to discharge the debt he had thus taken upon himself.

To leave England therefore, and to escape from their threats and importunities, while he hoped to obtain, as a tutor, a salary which he might divide between them and his family, was his most earnest wish. But even this humble hope was now frustrated; and though he appeared calm and composed before his mother, who watched his countenance with the most anxious solicitude, he almost for the first time felt what it was to look back on the past without having one crime with which to reproach himself, yet forward to the future without a hope, and almost without a friend!

Generous.

Generous and candid himself, and respecting men only for their worth and their talents, he had never till now been thoroughly convinced that, with the generality of the world, there is no crime so unpardonable as poverty; and that, when an untitled family fall to decay, their pretensions to ancestry, far from giving them a claim to commiseration, become ridiculous in the opinion of the suddenly fortunate.—He, who might truly be said to be

“Of gentle blood, part shed in honour's cause,”

POPE.

was now pursued for the sum of seven hundred pounds, by a man who called himself a gentleman, but was, in fact, a money-lender, the son of a taylor; and harassed by another for a thousand pounds, who had been an auctioneer, but who, having amassed a considerable sum of money, had quitted the hammer, and was become a banker.

These

These men, while they despised the indigence of poor Marchmont, and thought, like Briggs, "that a pedigree pays no debts," had yet taken it into their heads, that a young man so well connected would not be suffered to remain in prison, and that, if they threatened him with such an exertion of the power they had acquired over him, they should obtain at least some part of the money for which he had engaged himself.—It was in vain that he assured them, that of his father's house he was the last—while of the ruined fortunes of that house they could not be ignorant; that as to the relations of his mother, though two of her sisters had married men of high rank, he was so far from having any interest with them, that he was not even by sight known to any of his maternal relations.

Far from softening the hearts of his pursuers by this representation of his circumstances, he found that the more desperate

desperate his situation was, the less they seemed inclined to forbearance.—Tormented every day by some new plan of the one (who, being himself a schemer, fancied that Marchmont might relieve himself by some project), and perplexed by the threats of the other, he found that he must conceal himself from the persecution of both, or that they would inevitably avail themselves of that most improvident law, which enables a creditor to imprison the debtor who cannot pay him when he is at liberty;—as if an unhappy man, torn from his friends, deprived of his credit, depressed in his talents, and probably ruined in his health, could do more to pay his debts, than when he is at liberty to pursue his interest, or make the most of his industry—a law which confounds innocence with guilt, and equally punishes intentional fraud and inevitable misfortune; yet which exists no where in such force

force as in a country boasting of its enlarged humanity and perfect freedom.

Such was the sad fate of Marchmont, that though guilty of no crime, and though he had devoted himself to duties from the purest motives of integrity and filial piety, he now found himself pursued like a felon, and had the horrors of perpetual confinement before his eyes.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The tenant of a night-haunted ruin!

ACCUSTOMED insensibly to her solitude, Althea passed her time without murmuring. Her mind compelled thus to exert its strength at so early a period; and her education having been such as had not enfeebled while it ornamented her excellent understanding, she not only became reconciled to a situation which to most young women would have been intolerable, but every day learned to rejoice at the election she had made, and compare the melancholy tranquillity of her present situation with the splendid wretchedness to which an union
with

with Mohun would have condemned her. Believing that, unless she could sell herself to some equally odious connection, the smallness of her fortune and the peculiar circumstances of her situation (held down as she was by the selfish policy of Lady Dacres) would prevent her ever marrying, she thought of passing her life, if not always in as solitary a manner as she now lived, yet certainly in a single state; and when she recollected all her aunt was, she thought of this rather with complacency than regret. Without predilection in favour of any one (for the infant preference she had felt for Marchmont could hardly be called so), she tried to look forward with cheerfulness to the few and simple duties that in such a situation, and with so small a fortune, she had to fulfil. There is no state of life in which objects for such duties may not be found; but none more forcibly attracted her benevolence than the poor old woman Mrs. Mosely, to whose cottage

tage her lonely rambles were the most frequently directed, and who was become her regular pensioner.

This little hut, for it was hardly more, consisting of only two small rooms on the ground, and two of the same size under the thatched roof, was now by the bounty of Althea rendered as comfortable as it would admit of, and the general condition of its inhabitant much ameliorated. Yet while this poor helpless being incessantly blessed the considerate kindness of her young benefactress, Althea observed something in her manner which indicated some pressure of the mind—something that seemed not to belong to fear of *future* poverty, and she was in no immediate want; but, on the contrary, acknowledged herself to be surrounded with many and unexpected comforts. There were however, at times, such symptoms of a pre-occupied mind, or some peculiar interest affecting it, in the deportment of Mrs. Mosely, that

Althea was sometimes tempted to doubt whether she was not, as the people of the country believed, privy to some secret. Yet of what nature could it be? That she was acquainted with a concealed treasure buried somewhere in the domains of her ancient master, seemed very improbable; since the Marchmont family could not have been reduced to distress, had they possessed such a resource; and that the indigence of poor Mrs. Mosely herself was but too real, there were proofs enough.—Yet why did she sometimes, when Althea was with her, start at every sound, appear hurried, breathless, and confused; look eagerly from her little window, and with difficulty command herself so as to shew that attention the presence of her benefactress demanded? Althea often attempted to discover the cause of all this, but was obliged to content herself with the excuses Mrs. Mosely made; that it was owing to the terrors and hurries she
had

had gone through during the latter part of her service in Mr. Marchmont's family, and the poverty she had felt and dreaded since.

Besides this solitary pensioner, Althea had soon a little humble circle, to whom the goodness of her heart prompted her to render a thousand kind offices: she had not indeed much money, but for herself she wanted so little, that she could without imprudence clothe the half-naked infants of one poor cottager, relieve by a trifling weekly allowance the helpless superannuated father of another, pay a nurse for attending the wife of a third, and purchase flax or wool for the industrious family of a fourth. For some she worked herself, others she instructed how to work; and she was always ready to listen to the rustic tale of sorrow, and to give (what the poor do not always find) compassion and attention, even when it was not in her power greatly to alleviate

alleviate the distresses to which she listened.

The children of her host became the peculiar objects of her generous care. One of them was a little boy of about five years old, who attached himself to her with so much simple affection, that he followed her in all her walks, and crept continually into her room when she was alone; where, if he thought she was busy, and would not like to be interrupted, he sat himself silently down in a corner, and remained quiet till she gave him leave to speak to her.

This boy then became of course peculiarly her favourite; and she not unfrequently found in the sound of his innocent voice a relief against the silence of her dreary habitation, when Mrs. Wansford was busied in her domestic concerns at a distance in the house, and her husband absent, or working as he often did when he was able, in that part
of

of the old garden in which he raised a few vegetables for his family.

At these times it not unfrequently happened that the children attended their parents, or that the elder girl was sent on messages; and then there reigned a silence so dreary around the house, that Althea sometimes went out merely to hear a human voice. If any sounds broke this profound repose, they were only such as impressed melancholy ideas. The ancient dove-house, mark of former manorial dignity, had long since fallen to decay; but Wansford had nailed up some boards within the shelter of one of the thick buttresses, and the hoarse cooing of the few pigeons re-echoed round them. The rooks, long since driven from their flourishing colony in a wood of tall elms that *once* shaded the house, now seemed as they slowly sailed over it to regret their abandoned residence. Sometimes a flight of sea-fowl clamoured amid the billowy clouds;

clouds; and when the wind blew from the south-west, the heavy waves were heard breaking monotonously on the shore, or distinctly in the stillness of night in low and hollow murmurs;—while, within the house, the least breath of air hummed and sung along the passages, and through the crevices of doors fastened up, producing such effects from various currents, and confinement, as, aided by an imagination addicted to superstition, might have been magnified into low sighs and half-stifled complaints.

The sullen vibrations of a clock which belonged to Wansford, and was placed near the door of what they now called the kitchen, was plainly heard in the room where Althea sat; and the melancholy measure of time was not to her the least unpleasant sound that broke the solemn silence of which she felt the dreariness. She seldom, however, gave way to the dejection which most young persons would have yielded to, but drove

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it away, sometimes by having recourse to her books (for she had now received and arranged them), and sometimes by playing one of those simple airs, in which she particularly excelled, though she was not a very great proficient in music.

Now, however, arrived the very long evenings of December, and beginning of January, when Wansford happened to be confined to his bed by the rheumatism, and his wife attending on him; so that the part of the house where Althea's sitting-room was situated was of an evening quite deserted, except by the servant girl, who remained alone in the kitchen, often trembling when she remembered the stories she had heard, and looking fearfully towards the door every time the wind shook the old loose boards and rusty lock.

On these nights it was that Althea sometimes found all her fortitude and philosophy almost unequal to repel the comfortless sort of feeling that assailed

her. It was not fear, for the moment she began to reason with herself she knew that every kind of fear was groundless and ridiculous. From supernatural agents she could have nothing to apprehend, did they really exist; but against their existence it was with her an unanswerable argument, that the Director of the world would never violate a known law of nature to answer no possible end. Of the intrusion of any living being there was almost as little probability; for what temptation could there be for the nocturnal robber in a house where there was very little more than the simple furniture necessary for a peasant's family? Notwithstanding all this reasoning, however, Althea earnestly wished for the return of more cheerful days; and cast many a wistful look towards the sea, which on a clear day was visible from several of the windows of the house; and to which she fancied her walks might be extended.

It

It was only during the long and gloomy evenings that she felt distressed by the loneliness and seclusion of her situation. In the day-time she had not a moment unoccupied; and when the weather was such as would not allow her to make her village visits—

For "now the fields were dank, the ways were mire,"

MILTON.

she not unfrequently had recourse to the great banqueting-room up stairs, where, taking her little companion with her, she walked some hours for exercise. Yet it was certainly not such as greatly exhilarated her spirits; for Marchmont, his dispersed and distressed family, his blasted and ruined fortunes, were continually present to her mind; and while little Wansford, mounted on a stick, gamboled backwards and forwards before her, she figured to herself what Mrs. Mosely had formerly described to her, the infancy of that unfortunate young man, when in

these then splendid rooms he was the first object of his doting parents, who gazed at him with prophetic fondness, as the future support — as one who was likely even to increase the respectability, of their ancient family. A month or six weeks passed nearly in the same way. It was late in the month of February, when the weather having been stormy for many days, Althea found herself languid and unwell; and believing that exercise would relieve her from an oppressive pain in her head, she took the child with her, not being in spirits to encounter the wide solitude of the apartments alone; and with a book resorted to the banqueting-room, which might indeed have been as well called a gallery.

Here she continued to walk for some time, till another heavy wintry storm coming on, it became suddenly so dark, that she was returning hastily to her own room; when glancing her eyes towards
the

the great folding door which led to the stair-case, half of which was open, she fancied that some living creature ran hastily by. It seemed to be a dog—yet there was none about the house but a large white mastiff, usually chained up in the yard: this, whatever it was, was not so large an animal; and Althea, with something like fear mingling with curiosity, went to the door; and looking along the passage (now almost entirely dark) that led to those apartments of which so terrific an idea had been entertained, she thought she saw the same creature run swiftly along, but she immediately lost sight of it—it disappeared down another passage; and Althea had no inclination to trace it farther, though she felt a considerable deal of surprise. She now hastened down the stairs, not without looking involuntarily behind her: she saw nothing, however, and in some agitation reached her own room.

A moment's reflection restored her to composure. Of what was she afraid?— and how was it extraordinary that a stray dog should wander into a house in so ruinous a condition as were almost all the uninhabited parts of this? She endeavoured by such reflections to drive from her mind a circumstance that was certainly of no consequence: but still it returned to her, and she found the recollection of it attended with some kind of regret, for she no longer felt disposed to take her melancholy walks in the gallery: and this added another deprivation to the many she was compelled already to submit to; for, gloomy as these were, they procured a sort of change in bad weather, which it was unpleasant to relinquish. But now a dread hung about her which she could not immediately conquer, though she was ashamed of owning that she felt it even to herself.

This

This was perhaps increased by Mrs. Wansford's telling her a day or two afterwards, that as she was sitting up with her husband, who after a violent paroxysm of the rheumatism had fallen into a doze, she had either heard, or fancied she heard, amid the profound stillness of the night, the slow light steps of some person walking about the house.

“Once, Ma'am,” said she, “to be sure I thought it must be you coming out of your room, the steps seemed so near; and I was afraid you were ill, and I was going to open the door to see—but just at that moment my heart somehow misgave me; I stopped a little to listen, and I could almost swear that I heard whatever it was go softly, softly, and lightly along the back passage, and go to the rooms where my husband puts our malt and hops. Then I was sure it could not be you; and my heart was up in my mouth! I am sure at the time I thought I had never heard such an unaccountable

able noise since I have been in this house.—But, after all,” continued she, pausing, “after all, perhaps, it might be only fancy.”

“I dare say it was nothing more,” said Althea; “perhaps you were fatigued, and worn with anxiety; and when that is the case, we are apt to give way to fears and fancies that would never at another time be indulged.”

“I should not have thought so much, perhaps, of it,” resumed Mrs. Wansford, “but that Tiger has been so restless of nights lately, that it has been impossible for me and the girl to make him quiet. He has flown round the house as if he was mad—then back again—and barking ready to tear up the ground. My husband was waked by him once or twice out of a sound sleep; and I told him what a taking the dog was in, and that I was quite frightened at it, and was afraid it would fright you. But Wansford said it was nothing but nonsense; that there

was no reason for fear, and that he was sure it was only a fox, or some vermin about the house, that made Tiger rave so. Sometimes, indeed, in hard weather, we have had foxes come quite into the house, as it were, after our poultry; and perhaps it might be the case now."

"It might be a fox that passed the door," thought Althea; "for why into so lonely and deserted a place should not such an animal come for shelter? It may be one of them that traverses these desolate rooms of a night." Althea thought of the verse in Isaiah—

"But the wild beast of the desert shall lie there,
and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures."

"Alas!" added she, with a sigh, "what has this unfortunate family of Marchmont done, that their venerable abode, sanctified by the long sufferings of loyalty, should be under this cruel malediction?"

The

The solution, however, that she had now received of the causes of those slight disturbances which had alarmed her, quieted the disagreeable sensations she had felt, and insensibly the impression they had made wore away. Notwithstanding the advanced season, the weather now became so severe, as to take from her all disposition to return even to the walk in the banqueting-room. From her poor old pensioner she was for some time excluded; for the snow was deep, and to reach her cottage was difficult till the way was beaten—difficulties which Mrs. Mosely could by no means encounter to come to her. Althea, therefore, was obliged to content herself with sending the servant girl with a supply of provisions, and an enquiry after the solitary inhabitant of the cottage, which she continued to repeat for a few days.

When Althea herself asked this girl after Mrs. Mosely, her answers were such as might be expected; but it happened

pened that passing one day into the kitchen to enquire for her return, she heard her say in her Devonshire dialect to Mrs. Wansford, who was busied there in preparing some food for her husband, "I declare I cannot think what iz coom to the ould wewman—she seems always tew much in a fluster to send back any mezzage to Mifs, zoomhow."

"But she was very thankful," said Mrs. Wansford, "was she not, for Mifs's goodness?"

"Yes, sure!" answered Hannah, "but, Lord! mythink she is vastly odd az it twere. Then it is az hard to get tew her az if she was a lady herself. She've creeped away out of the rewm wher she used for to be, intew another little beck rewm, and the dewce at all can I make her hear, she's sew diff. I said tew her that I had tewk'd down ever so much of our *cloom**, with things as she had had,

* Crockery ware, or glass.

and

and that yew had sent for it, so she said I might take back what I whewld; she coonet no hew tell one from tother— So——”

“The poor old woman is not well then?” said Althea, as she entered the room.

Hannah, colouring at having been thus overheard, and afraid that Althea might be offended, answered confusedly, “No, Miss; she be’ent sick, but she seems somehow in trouble.”

“I will go myself to-morrow,” said Althea; “I suppose the weather affects her, poor creature!”

She afterwards made some other enquiries, whether she had sufficient firing, and whether the path to the cottage was practicable, and then returned to her employments.

One of these had lately been the study of that period of English history when the Marchmont family had been so distinguished by its sufferings and fidelity; for

for this point of time had now, from her situation in the scene of many of the events that had occurred, and from her favourable opinion of the unfortunate successor to the virtues, and, alas! to the misfortunes of these loyalists, acquired particular interest in the opinion of Althea.

In the course of her education she had gone through the history usually put into the hands of young people. Her understanding was equally clear and solid, and her memory remarkably retentive; yet a very young person usually reads the succession of monarchs, and the history of battles at a remote period, so much more as a task than a pleasure, that now her ripened reason gave to her present study at least the advantage of novelty. And that it might be every way profitable, she began with the Saxon heptarchy. But uncertain accounts, mingled and debased with monkish legends, accounts of beings
who,

who, with almost the single exception of Alfred, were so far from being fit to reign, that they were not fit to live, could not long detain her; nor was her imagination much cheered by the rude attempts at polishing the half savage Anglo-Saxon by the fierce Norman invader. In following their line through, and those of Plantagenet and Tudor, there is but little to soothe the mind. Ambition, the vice of great minds, is so degraded by ferocity, religion so perverted by superstition, the father is so often armed against the son, the child against the parent, the brothers against each other; so few of those "charities" existed among them which alone render human nature respectable; and the people were so continually the victims of the hateful passions of their princes, that the reader rejoices to bring his observations down to later times, and hopes that when the period in which what is called the *art* of government becomes better

better understood, order, and of course happiness, might be its effects. But from the *glorious* Queen Elizabeth, she who is pronounced by Lord Bacon to be "*admirable among women, and memorable among princes,*" to the wretched and degraded pensioner of Louis the Fourteenth (Charles the Second), there is hardly an interval that can be read with pleasure by one who, instead of having formed ideas from the little abridged histories so early put into the hands of children, dares to think for himself.

It was to this interval that the particular attention of Althea was turned. The first mention of the Marchmont family was in the reign of James the First. But it was in that of his unhappy son that they became remarkable.

Althea had borrowed of Mrs. Mosely a copy of a sort of memoir of the family begun by the grandfather, and continued by the father of Marchmont; of which a servant had been employed to make

two or three copies, and one of them had been given to Mrs. Mosely, which she preserved with great care, and which she had put into Althea's possession, with a long exordium on the eminence and consequence of the persons to whom it related.

To trace through the tumult of civil discord, and the bewildering subtleties of mistaken politics, the bravery and persevering loyalty of a single family, was a task suited to the present state of Althea's mind. It seemed like designing the different appearances of a beautiful tree, which, though now shorn of its most flourishing honours, presented a fine and venerable form to the eye of the painter, and still produced some fair and verdant branches, though its trunk was injured by time and accident.

CHAP. III.

His face most foul and filthy was to see,
With squinting eyes, contrary ways extended,
And loathly mouth, unmeet a mouth to be,
That nought but gall and venom comprehended,
And wicked words that God and man offended.

A SECOND fall of snow now rendered the project Althea had formed of enquiring herself after Mrs. Mosely impracticable. In this western county indeed it lay less than in the more eastern, northern, or midland parts of England; but it had drifted so much against the banks and hedges, that the path to the cottage was again for her impassable.— The mild philosophy of the young recluse struggled against the heavy depression

pression which such perfect seclusion, at a season so dreary, could hardly fail to inflict; but her studies were not much calculated to exhilarate her thoughts.— They led her from the detail of public calamity, to its effects on private life; from the misfortunes of the monarch to the consequent miseries of his servants—and the sad consequences of civil war on domestic happiness.

From the then most respectable condition of a private country gentleman, that ancestor of Marchmont, who first quitted it to attend a court, became personally attached to Charles the First, while Prince of Wales; and afterwards, when these unhappy dissensions broke out between Charles and his Parliament, which ended in the destruction of monarchy, Mr. (afterwards Sir Armin) Marchmont was one of the first men of property in the West who declared for the King.

In .

In the course of those sad years, which deluged the kingdom with blood, the second of his three sons and his only brother fell in the field. He did not survive them long; and his eldest son yielding for a while to a torrent it was fruitless to resist, and residing at Eastwoodleigh, it became an asylum for the wandering and dispersed royalists; while in rendering it such he narrowly escaped sharing their fate—and only by his being personally inactive, and by his popularity in his immediate neighbourhood. But when the son of the deceased monarch made his last effort at Worcester, Mr. Marchmont (for, his father being only a knight, he had no title) attended him thither with a small but chosen party of followers. After the event of that day, he returned, slightly wounded, towards home, and was for some time concealed in his own house. When it became safe to re-appear, he resumed, with some precaution, his former way of living;

living; but by the sad condition to which his friends were reduced, as well as the restraint he was himself compelled to live under, his spirits and health became so much affected, that he gradually sunk into the grave, leaving his inheritance (impaired by fines, and the assistance he had sent the exiled King) to the eldest of the infant sons of his younger brother.

This young man, who at the Revolution was about five-and-twenty, unable to deny or to defend the misconduct of James, yet detesting from the influence of hereditary prejudice what he deemed the usurpation of William, absented himself entirely from public life; while his brother, who had entered early into the army, followed the fortunes of the misguided monarch, to whom he had sworn allegiance, and, marrying in France, became founder of that family with whom young Marchmont had some time resided.

The

The next heir, the grandfather of Marchmont, would have acted wisely, had he remained a quiet spectator of the attempts that were made in the year 1715 to re-establish the banished family; but his zeal was so unguarded, that a considerable part of his own and his wife's fortune was hardly sufficient to save him from the consequences of his open adherence to the "good old cause."

But not less bigoted to principle, in pursuance of which he could not act but at the risk of his whole fortune, he educated his children in the same ideas he himself entertained; and thirty years afterwards, in 1745, the family was reckoned so decidedly *Jacobite*, that their houses were seized at that period by the neighbouring Deputy-Lieutenant—and the same precaution was used in regard to him as with the Catholic gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Cut off from every advantage which the respectability of his family, or his own talents,

talents, might have given him in public life, while his fortune was sapped by the loans of his predecessors to their banished friends, the father of young Marchmont saw himself, towards the middle of his life, surrounded by a family of three daughters and a son, with only a nominal fortune—for his estates were mortgaged for almost as much as they were worth. When once this happens, the very expedients that are employed to ward off the ruin, bring it on more rapidly. The last Marchmont lived only long enough to see the inevitable destruction of his house—to see the son he so passionately loved likely to become a destitute wanderer, and his wife and daughters destined to indigence.—His heart was broken, and his eyes closed on this cruel prospect; while his unhappy son, by hazarding his personal liberty, rescued, with difficulty, his poor remains from the inhuman gripe of the law.—

Such

Such was, in brief, the detail collected by Althea from the family memoirs, to which Mrs. Mosely's narrative served as a supplement. To read over the period of history with which the former account was intimately connected, occasioned, in the mind of Althea, wonder and pity. That there were men who adhered from principle, and still more from personal affection, to Charles the First, misled and obstinate as he was, she could easily conceive; but it was more difficult to account for the infatuation of those who sacrificed their families and their country to the degraded *pensioner* of *France*, and the unfeeling employer of *Jeffries*. Still there is something so respectable in the enthusiasm of even mistaken fidelity, something so impressive in the disinterested generosity of sacrificing every thing for an exiled and ruined family, that the ancestors of Marchmont became more than before

the objects of her veneration; and their unfortunate descendant, of her pity.

In dwelling frequently on this topic, the mind of Althea turned itself to enquire if nothing could be done to alleviate the melancholy fate of a family so worthy of more prosperous fortune.— She was herself, alas! a more isolated being than any of those whose destiny she lamented, and but very little richer. Yet she could not help frequently returning to consider whether there were no means of befriending them; but as often as she did so, difficulties arose that made her for a while relinquish the hope of being able to accomplish it.

How indeed was it possible for her to address her father on behalf of a family to whom she believed he had conceived some dislike, and with any part of which Sir Audley did not know she had the slightest acquaintance? or how could she apply to Mrs. Marchmont herself with
offers

offers of service? Still, however, she could not wholly dismiss the idea; and as it would be doing something, she determined to write to Miss Everley (with whom she still, though rarely, corresponded), and, making such an excuse for her curiosity as her local situation might well furnish her with, ask for some account of the present state of the Marchmont family.

Althea then was set down to this letter, when, as was Mrs. Wansford's custom, she came into Althea's sitting-room to make the enquiries of the morning after her health.—To those Althea made in her turn—the good woman answered—“ Ah, dear Ma'am! this weather is very sad for my poor husband—He gets hardly any better, and I am afraid he will be quite confined again.—I think more of it than I should at another time, because I don't know how I should do to get advice for him; for I am sure Mrs. Cookson won't come
D 4 through

done more than growl—he would have run to the place.”

“ No,” replied Mrs. Wansford; “ he could not do that, for he could not get into the old part of the house. The doors above are all shut up, you know, and there is no way below. To be sure I have not much notion what any body should do there; but I firmly believe there are *travellers*, or some strange people, that hide about the house—and I own it *does* fright me.”

Althea now recollecting the dog, which she had certainly seen, and feeling by no means delighted with the idea of *such* neighbours as her hostess described, could not help betraying some emotion in her countenance; yet unwilling to add to the terror which she saw had taken possession of Mrs. Wansford, she forbore to say all she thought, and only observed, that if such was really her persuasion, it would be better to make
some

some enquiry into the matter, and to take some precaution against the danger that might follow.

“Why, so I have been telling Wansford,” answered she.—“But I declare he is quite provoking—he will insist upon it, that ’tis nothing in the world but my fancy—or some accidental thing of no consequence.—I wish, dear Ma’am, you would but speak to him yourself—He won’t tell *you* it is fancy, perhaps.—If you are not afraid of catching cold, do come out yourself, and see if there is not a track of feet as plain as can be.”

To make this enquiry, Althea consented; and it was indeed very evident that a person or persons had gone as far as that part of the house described by Mrs. Wansford, but *there* seemed to have disappeared. Yet there was no visible way by which the house could be entered on that side.—Althea now proposed to Mrs. Wansford to make some examination within side the house—but

she declared herself afraid of going, unless some man could be found to accompany her—which she said it was not easy to do, as there was no person about the house who could go with her, and her husband; besides that he was disabled by the rheumatism, became impatient whenever she insisted upon there being any occasion of alarm.—Althea, though far from feeling at this moment any extraordinary portion of courage, yet offered herself as an auxiliary: but the poor woman was too seriously frightened to explore the uninhabited rooms with so slender a guard; and Althea felt that on the approach of night she should be extremely uncomfortable, in the idea that there were near her beings of whom it was much more reasonable to be afraid than of the departed family of the Marchmonts, who were the reputed inhabitants of that part of the house.

Night however came, and with it a sudden thaw that obliterated at once
all

all evidence of the fact of which Mrs. Wansford was so solicitous to convince her husband:—but the impression it had made on her mind, and on Althea's, was not so easily effaced; and Althea found it impossible to go to rest without having recourse to an expedient to which she was generally averse—that of the servant girl bringing her bed into the same room. The door was then as well secured as their united contrivances could effect, and Althea lay down without undressing herself.—The hours, however, passed quietly—there was no unusual noise about the house—and towards the middle of the night, though her thoughtless attendant was in a profound sleep, she went softly to the window, and by the light afforded by the moon, almost at full, yet often obscured by wandering clouds, she could see to some distance around. The view was not indeed on the same side of the house as that to which the footsteps had been traced, but it was difficult

difficult for any person going from the nearest villages to reach any quarter of the building without passing along some part of the ground she could now survey. She saw, however, neither animal nor human being—and supposed that, with whatever design these intruders had before approached, the lightness of the night had now deterred them.—Again she wearied herself with conjectures, and again desisted; for she found no way of accounting for such an appearance, but by supposing that the design was to rob: yet why should such a risk be incurred, where there was so certainly nothing to take?

Her apprehensions kept her sleepless till the morning broke: she then sunk into forgetfulness; and it was not till some time after her usual hour that she went down into her parlour to breakfast.

As she seldom rang the bell that Wansford had contrived to mend for her, she was going herself into the
fort

fort of kitchen where he and his family usually sat, to ask for her breakfast; when she was met in the passage by Mrs. Wansford, who, with a look of dismay, said—"Dear Ma'am, I was coming to see for you. There are two such strange-looking men along with my husband!—and they are asking such a number of odd questions!—I cannot, for my life, imagine what they want."

Althea, whose imagination was still full of the track that had been seen in the snow, fancied that these might be the persons who clandestinely visited the house; but as their coming now was a direct contradiction to their motives for coming before, she recollected herself, and asked Mrs. Wansford what sort of people they were?

"That is more than I can tell you, I'm sure," replied the good woman.—
 "For my part, I do not know what to make of them, and I can see Wansford knows as little: however, he keeps civil

to them.—I wish you would come in, my dear Miss, as 'twere by chance.”

“ I'll come, certainly,” said Althea, alarmed, though she knew not why.—“ But they cannot be people that want me?”

Then, impelled by fear and curiosity; she entered the room, but instantly shrunk back, for the figures of the two men, who sat opposite Wansford, terrified her.

Neither of them arose at her entrance, though *her* appearance was certainly such as demanded that mark of respect from persons of theirs.—One of them was a short mean figure between fifty and sixty, wrapped in an old blue great coat with a red cape, and he wore a carrotty scratch wig pulled forward over a face which could not, without an affront to the species, be called human. Squalid and despicable as this wretch was, he seemed to be invested with some authority over the other; whose great athletic

athletic figure impressed terror, while that of his companion raised abhorrence. This second man had a broad red face, deeply scarred with the small-pox, with a black patch across his forehead; greasy shock hair, and a shabby coarse surtout, which altogether answered so completely to the idea she had formed of a ruffian, that Althea had, at the moment, no other expectation but that one of these men would confine Wansford, while the other robbed the inhabitants of the house.

Such were the alarming figures that, on the appearance of Althea, seemed, with renewed eagerness, to pursue the enquiry, whatever it was, that they were making of Wansford; who, confused and alarmed by interrogations he did not understand, seemed very desirous of getting rid of his unwelcome visitors, yet afraid of offending them.

Althea, unable to sustain for a moment the insolent looks of the man last described,

described, hurried back into her parlour—Mrs. Wansford, in increased dismay, following her:

“ Dear Ma’am,” said she—“ what do you think of these men? what can they be?—and what can they possibly want?”

“ I have never seen bailiffs, or their followers,” said Althea; “ but I should fear, from the description I have heard of such people, that these are some such men.”

“ Bailiffs!” exclaimed Mrs. Wansford, turning as pale as ashes, “ what can bailiffs want with my husband?—Mercy upon me!—He does not, I am sure, owe any body five pounds in the world—and I am *as* sure he has never done any harm in his life.—Oh, my God! what is going to happen to him?”

The poor woman, who had eagerly seized on this alarming notion, was now so overcome with it, that she could not stay in the room; but notwithstanding the terror with which the sight of the
men

men affected her, she was hastening back to that where they were with her husband, when in the passage, feeling his way with his cane, for he was half blind, the elder of the horrid-looking wretches met her.—Wansford, with a mixture of fear and indignation in his countenance, followed him, though so lame that he went on crutches.—Shocked and amazed at his approaching her, Althea had no power to move from the place where she stood. The man, stalking slowly up quite close to her, while she shrunk from his approach, in a loud and slow voice, whose sound would alone have conveyed a perfect idea of the hideous monster that uttered it, thus spoke—
“I understand, Madam, that . . . you . . . are . . . the . . . daughter . . . of . . . Sir Audley . . . Dacres, . . . Ba-ro-net,—proprietor of this house.—These people then are your servants?”

“And who are you, Sir,” said Althea, collecting all her courage, “that, knowing

Knowing to whom this house belongs, and who *I* am, take the liberty of thus intruding?"

"My business . . ." began the wretch again.

"Your business cannot be with me, nor with Sir Audley's servants—They do not know you—I beg you will go from hence."—The man, who found by the trembling of her voice that she was terrified, now thought that he should prevail by mere dint of fear: striking therefore his cane against the ground, he said in a still louder tone—"Understand, Madam, that I am *authorised* in what I demand, and"

"For God's sake!" cried Althea, speaking to Wansford, "what does he want?"

"He insists, Miss, upon being allowed to search the house. I have refused him; for why?—I'm sure by his looks he don't seem an honest man than they he pretends to search after—
and

and what if he was?—He has got no right to search here—or if he has, why don't he shew it me?—why don't he shew his warrant?—But, instead of that, he won't even tell me who he looks after!—Come, come, Mr. What's-your-name, come out of my young lady's room, or I'll shew you that, lame as I am, I'll not let any such fellows fright her.”

“I would explain to the lady,” said the disgusting wretch, regardless of this remonstrance—“first, what my demands are—secondly, the authority with which I am invested—thirdly, the grounds of my proceeding—fourthly, the consequence of resisting.”

“I will hear nothing, Sir,” exclaimed Althea; “I will not hold any converse with you. I am perfectly convinced that a person of *your* appearance can have no business in this house, and I must insist upon your leaving it.”

“My

“ My appearance!” muttered the horrid fiend—“ my appearance! I see, I see how it is; here is collusion.—I say, man,” (turning to Wansford) “ that I will execute my duty—I will examine the other part of the house.”

“ And I say,” cried Wansford, seizing him by the collar with one hand, while he supported himself with the other, “ that you shall go out of that part of it where you are already.” So saying, by the application of all his strength he jerked the man into the passage; Mrs. Wansford, dreading lest his follower should fall upon her husband, followed trembling and crying; while Althea, who had never suffered such an alarm in her life before, shut the door of her room, and bolted it within.

She listened, and heard a scuffle in the kitchen, which increased her affright; yet she knew not, in the confusion of her thoughts, whether she feared these people as common robbers, or as ruffians

fians authorized by law to hunt some unhappy person to destruction. The latter, though she knew not whom they sought, seemed to her more detestable than the former. Her present agitation, however, permitted her only to listen in breathless suspense: she heard Wansford loudly insist on their leaving the house, declaring he would sue them if they dared to stay; while the old miscreant preached aloud of his authority, and his power; and his follower, half-ridiculing and half-menacing Wansford, seemed determined to support his employer. After this had lasted some time, to the increasing terror of Althea, she heard other voices interpose, which very plainly, but somewhat roughly, took the part of Wansford, and, as it seemed, added more forcible arguments than he had himself been able to bring forward; for the enemy were now expelled, and she heard the governor of the fortress engage

engage his auxiliaries to celebrate their victory in some of his best cyder.

When they were set down to do this, Mrs. Wansford appeared at the door of Althea's room, which was readily opened to her.

“ Oh! my dearest Miss,” cried she, as she entered—“ Sure I never in all my whole life have been so frightened—and I am sure you too must have been terrified!—Dear! how pale you look!—Let me get you something.”

“ No,” said Althea—“ I am very well now.—But tell me who these people are?—and how, at last, you got them out of the house?”

“ Ah! as to who they *are*, I know no more than you do, Ma'am, but I know they wanted no good. Did any mortal ever see such a frightful-looking wretch as the ruffian that came in here? My poor Wansford, cripple as he is, would never have got rid of them, if I had not
bethought

bethought me of sending Hannah down to the men at plough in lower park croft; I knew they'd soon clear the house of 'em; and so they did.— John Hedbury says they're both bailiffs—or one's a lawyer, and t'other a catchpole, 'tis much one; and he knows they've been about this country, and some more along with them, for three or four weeks—creeping about, and asking this man, and asking t'other man, what strangers there were in these parts? Some of our neighbours were talking about these bad-looking fellows at the Nag's-Head, John says, but last Saturday night; some said they were excisemen, and some that they were spies—but another again said he knew one of them—that old one; and he is a lawyer at Plymouth: John Hedbury mentioned his name, but I can't think of it now. Some thought, it seems, that the person they are hunting for is one that has run away with money from his master; ano-

ther guesfed that it was a Jacobine, or Jacobite; I don't know, not I, what they call 'em; but Miller Clayfield faid he was fure as could be, that it was fome man in debt, and that this lawyer fellow had got a writ againft him, and t'other was a bum bailiff."

"Still," faid Althea, "I do not comprehend why the fearch of thefe purfuers fhould be fo particularly directed to this houfe?"

"Nor I neither, I am fure. I cannot think why they fhould come here indeed!—As my husband told them, an Englifhman's houfe is his caftle, and he fhould not have thought of their pretending to fearch this; for though he was only a fervant, he had as much right to keep out any fuch dirty fellows as the firft Lord of the land. We are no likelier than other folks to harbour bad people, and I'm fure there are no people here; though, if there were, and it was only a poor man hiding for debt, I'm fure

fure

sure I'd never tell such as them; for to help such a one out of their clutches would be another thing."

"And do you know any body likely," said Althea, "to want such a friendly concealment? Perhaps Wansford does; and, unknown to you, may have taken some unfortunate person, thus pursued, into the house? Recollect, whether the noises you have heard, and the print of feet traced in the snow, which alarmed you so much, might not have something to do with the person that these bailiffs say they would search for?"

"Bless me! so they might, indeed!—And yet I cannot think, neither, that Wansford would do such a thing without telling me. Besides, who does *he* know? Here we live from one month to another, and not a living soul ever comes near us!—Besides, how, if Wansford had done so, how could he carry the person *viſtually* without my knowing it? Indeed, how could he carry it

at all? I never missed the value of a bit of bread. Where could such a person, if one *was* hid in the house, where could he sleep? There is no bed, I'm sure, in it—as you must have seen, Miss, when you went over it. Besides, I'm certain my husband would never do such a thing without telling me.”

“You remember, however,” said Althea, “that your husband laughed off all your fears, and would believe nothing about the noises that you talked of—as if he had some reason for wishing to avoid enquiry.”

Struck with this remark, yet unwilling to believe that Wansford could possess a secret he would not communicate to her, his wife now left Althea, determined to find out the mystery, if there was one; while Althea, who could neither cease her conjectures, nor fix on any that were probable,

probable, and whose spirits had been strangely hurried by the people she had seen, with difficulty composed her mind to follow the occupations of the day.

CHAP. IV.

Great enemy to this, and all the rest
That in the garden of Adonis springs,
Is wicked Time, who with his scythe address
Doth mow the flowering herbs and goodly things,
And all their glory to the ground down flings.

IN the course of the day Wansford related to Althea the conversation these men had held with him.

“ They began,” said he, “ by asking me whether I knew this person and that person in the neighbourhood, and *who* lived in the house? and *who* came to the house? and such a number of questions, that I could not tell, not I, what they would be at! Thinks I, you can’t have any good reason, my masters, for all this inquisitiveness?”

inquisitiveness? You look very like catchpoles; I don't half like you, so you'll not get much out of me! From one thing to another, they began to tell me that they were employed by some very worthy gentleman to discover a person who had done him a very great injury, and was, they had reason to believe, concealed somewhere in this neighbourhood. The old fellow then said, that, if they could find, and secure this man, but what his name was they did not choose to tell, they were to have a very considerable reward; and hinting that if I would help them, I should have a share, they desired I would let them search the house. For my part, I hate all attornies, having suffered enough once by one of them; and as to your bailiffs, and bailiffs' followers, I'd fain have such rascals dragged through the horsepond. So I told them that, whoever the person was that they wanted, I was very sure he could not be at Eastwood-

leigh; but that, if he was, I'd see the whole tribe of spies and sheriffs' officers at the devil, before I'd help one of them to take any poor fellow to prison. Upon that, the old swivel-eyed chap began in his prosing way to persuade me, and, when he found that would not do, to threaten me. Then you, Ma'am, came in, and the impudent fellow thought, I suppose, he could frighten you into ordering me to do it. I never saw such a ruffian. I believe, for my part, that it is Jack-Ketch himself: but Hedbury says his name is Vampire; that he is an attorney, and has been the ruin of a great many families, for that he is the greatest rascal in all the country! If I catch him or the other blackguard about the house again, I'll show them the way through the lower pond—that they may be sure of."

Althea now very seriously enquired of Wansford, whether there were any grounds for believing that the unfortunate

nate

nate man, of whom these satellites of the law were in search, was concealed about the house? Wansford, with every appearance of sincerity, declared that there could be no such circumstance, he believed it impossible, and could not imagine what had given rise to such a notion.

Althea then mentioned to him the tracks of feet that had been seen in the snow.

“Yes,” replied he, “my wife frightened herself strangely about it; but, after all, what was it owing to? These very men, depend upon it. Indeed, they as good as owned to me, that they had been about the house once or twice. I promise them, if they venture again, I shall shew them that there is more in the house than they bargain for. I’d no more mind shooting such pests to the world than a couple of mad dogs.”

Althea thought that the bravery of Wansford was a little misplaced, and

that it would have been better had he shewn more resolution in preventing the elder of the men from the impertinence of addressing himself to her. Concealing however her thoughts, she dismissed her host for the present, and attempted to lose the uneasy impresson that this strange circumstance had left: but it still recurred to her mind; nor could she forbear speaking of it, and suggesting such ideas as arose about it, to Mrs. Wansford, who, after another day or two had elapsed, told her, that she had taken every possible means to discover if Wansford was really engaged in concealing any one in the uninhabited parts of the house, and that she was convinced he had not. Another and another day passed, in one of which Althea visited her ancient friend at the cottage. The poor woman told her she had kept her bed, and expressed in the warmest terms her gratitude for all the kindness she had received. Althea observed none of that
confusion

confusion and singularity in her manner of which the servant girl had spoken. She was low and languid; but, in so melancholy a state of desertion, with only the darkening prospects of age, poverty, and sickness before her, such dejection was but too natural, and too common. Once or twice she seemed to wish to say something to Althea of more import than common complaints; and at length, on being encouraged to do so, she said, that as she was sure she should not outlive the winter, she wished she could see her nephew, the only relation she had, and that Althea would promise her, that, instead of being interred among the parish poor, she should be laid as near as possible, or as would be allowed, to the family burial place of the Marchmonts, and near her dear master, of whom when she now spoke, she seemed more affected than ever——But the old seldom weep!

Whatever was in Althea's power, she promised with that genuine goodness of heart which marked all her actions. She offered too to write to the relation whom Mrs. Mosely thus named with solicitude, but learned that he was at a great distance in the service of a gentleman, who would probably be unwilling to spare him; and that, if he would, the journey would be so expensive, that it would be impossible for him to undertake it. To this unsatisfied wish, therefore, Althea could apply no remedy; but, leaving her pensioner in better spirits than she found her, returned to her solitary home, with that self-content which always follows the consciousness of doing good.

On entering the parlour she found a letter on her table. It was from Linda Eversley; and after some details relative to persons and affairs much less interesting, the family of Marchmont was thus mentioned—

“ You

“ You enquire after those unfortunate people the Marchmonts. I know but little of them, as my brother is always hurt if they are spoken of; but when I received your letter I shewed it to him. He said, ‘ Tell Miss Dacres, that if my poor friend knew how generously she expresses an interest in his fate, I am persuaded he would forget half its bitterness—for very greatly did he admire her, as indeed who does not? However, you may tell her too, Linda, that I hope he is somewhat less unfortunate than he has been; for after several unsuccessful applications to become a tutor (one of which was to Sir Audley, offering to undertake the care of Mr. Dacres), he has at length found a situation in Ireland, not as a tutor, but with a nobleman who is improving and planting a considerable estate, which he has engaged Marchmont to superintend. He is gone to Ireland, as I hear from his mother, who, with his sisters, remains where she

did in Surry.' So far my brother's information goes.—Poor Marchmont! I agree with you, my dear Althea, that himself and his family are worthy of a better fate; for I am afraid Mrs. Marchmont and her daughters are in very uneasy circumstances. You know that my brother has more will than power to serve them, for his domestic unhappiness is not at all mitigated."

Miss Everfley then went into the history of her sister-in-law's vulgar tyranny: Althea hurried it over, as one of those incurable evils on which it is painful to dwell, and returned to lament the sad destiny of Marchmont and his family.

"How could my father," said she, "refuse to accept him for Mr. Dacres? Where would he have found a man better qualified? Her concern, that he was rejected, was equalled however by her surprise that he should apply to her father; and when she reflected on the former repulse he had met with, her heart

heart bled to think how cruelly severe *that* pressure of adversity must be which had reduced his high spirit to submit again to ask a favour of Sir Audley.

If it had been possible to add to that undiminished and acute regret with which Althea always thought of her lost friend, her more than mother, it would have been increased by her now reflecting, that limited as was that excellent woman's power of giving pecuniary assistance, yet that her active humanity would probably have found the means of alleviating the sufferings of Mrs. Marchmont and her children. Althea, in imagining all the mortifications, deprivations, and sorrows of that extreme indigence in which they were represented to be, looked from the window where she stood on the pile of building, of which only a part was seen, but a part magnificent even in ruins; she cast her eyes over the domain before it, denuded and changed as it was, and
then

then tried to conceive what must be the virtue of those who bore with patient fortitude so cruel a reverse.

To these thoughts succeeded that regret, which what are called the pleasures of life had never the power of exciting in the breast of Althea—that regret which arose from her inability to relieve the distresses she deplored. Sometimes she almost determined to write to Sir Audley, and beseech him to be a friend to these unhappy people. Then she dreaded his stern repulse; and recollected how improbable it was that he, who would condemn to a kind of imprisonment his own child, only for refusing to sacrifice herself to prospects of affluence and ambition, should be prevailed upon, by any intercession, to interest himself for persons who had no other claim upon him but *that* poverty which seemed in his opinion to be a crime.

Among

Among the various plans that Althea thus thought of and rejected, in regard to the mother and sisters of Marchmont, it at length occurred to her, that she might obtain some information at least about their present situation, if Mrs. Mosely would write to them; and this she determined to propose, offering to act as her secretary—a means by which she thought she might introduce herself, without impertinence or impropriety, to their knowledge. This benevolent project she put into execution the first day that was favourable for her walk: she found on the part of Mrs. Mosely rather acquiescence, than any expression of pleasure. “It was long,” she said, “since she had written to her dear ladies—she knew not whether her doing so might not be troublesome.” Althea, however, over-ruled every slight objection; the letter was written; and she returned home, flattering herself that some means would be found, by which she might become

come useful to a family in whose destiny she felt so deep an interest.

While she expected an answer, which could not arrive in less than a week or ten days, Althea returned to her solitary amusements. The weather was fine and mild for the season; and her spirits were revived, even by that distant promise of returning spring, which is given in sheltered situations so early as the middle of February. In that piece of ground which had once been a well cultivated garden, Althea had hitherto been deterred from walking, by its generally melancholy and ruinous appearance; when the bleak storm of mid-winter, or its chilling snows, added to the gloom which neglect and desolation spread over the place. But now the faint tinge of fresh green, which the sparges and some other early leaves lent to the spots of uncultivated earth (though mingled in many places with masses of fallen walls); were cheering to the sight, and tempted her

her to enquire if any of the ornaments of the garden had resisted "*Stern ruin's ploughshare,*" which had so deeply passed over almost all the rest of the place.

As no temptation had urged the spoilers to bear away the fruit-trees that lined the thick walls, they still existed; and neglected and grown heavy with wood, as they were, a few red buds, nearly expanded, were here and there visible. The surface of the broad gravel walk that encompassed the garden was now covered with moss; and the borders, which were divided from it by box, grown into a low ragged hedge, produced only weeds, unless in two or three patches where the warm shelter of the projecting buttresses had induced Wansford to sow some early vegetables. The espalier trees were almost timber; and the shrubs which had once been planted in a quarter behind them, as in a sort of nursery, were grown so large as to overshadow them. At the corners of the
cross

cross walks stood ancient heads of rosemary and lavender, overgrown with gray moss, and serving as a sort of specimen of the state of gardening in England when such plants were cultivated with almost as much care as is now given to the tenderest exotics.

In the centre of the garden was the carved pedestal of a large sun-dial, but the plate was gone. From thence, a broad straight walk, bordered with evergreens, of which only a few were alive, led to the ruins of a green-house, which Althea had been told opened into a pavilion, where, in the days of their prosperous fortune, the family of Marchmont used to entertain their company, or amuse themselves in the fine evenings of summer; for it looked into the pleasantest part of the then park, where a small river, pouring down from a high ridge of woodland, wound away to supply two large ponds within sight of the windows: but the coppices were now cut down, and

and the inconsiderable stream to the right lost among tangled brush-wood, furze, and broom. The doors that led into this pavilion were now locked: the green-house windows had been taken out and fold; and of the old orange-trees, and other plants so fondly cherished by the late owner of the place, no traces remained, save two or three broken cases producing funguses, and mouldering into touch-wood. The few garden tools that Wansford possessed, and some parcels of garden seeds and dried herbs fastened to the wall, were now all that was to be seen in this spacious place, once the abode of innocent pleasure. Althea, comparing its appearance with that of a magnificent modern conservatory, the property of a great contractor whose house near London she had visited with Lady Dacres, left it with a sigh, and crossed what once lay before the front windows as a parterre. Among the grass and moss that were now spread over it, a few crocuses

crocuses and hepaticas still forced their way, and in two or three places the snow-drops had spread themselves so thickly as to silver the ground in despite of obstructing weeds. Pensively philosophizing, Althea gathered some of them: they were hardly blown; but one of the little Wansfords, now running up to her, asked her leave to gather a few also, and then to dig some up, and put them in a pot to carry into the house. This childish project Althea, who loved to see any creature happy, rather encouraged. The child called her brother to help her; the garden pots were collected, filled with earth, and not without some labour carried into the house.— Their mother, however, objecting to this portable garden being placed in rooms where the purposes of her family œconomy were carrying on, the children proposed to put them up in the banqueting-room, where they had sometimes been permitted to play. This, after some
opposition

opposition from their father, they were allowed to do, and immediately proceeded to arrange their new green-house, assisted by the maid;—while Althea, for whom the simplest pleasure had charms, and who was not sorry to take this opportunity of visiting once more a place of which she had sometimes thought with fears that she was now half ashamed of, went up with them, and even directed their operations. She now again surveyed the room, which her imagination had lately filled with beings more terrific than spectres. It gave her no other idea than that of solitude and ruin. She observed that the cornices of this room, as well as the ivy that had crept into the hall beneath, would soon be peopled; for the sparrow and the robin had already begun to build among them. From hence she descended with her party, for she was by no means courageous enough to go alone, to that part of the building where Mrs. Wansford

ford had shewn her the footsteps in the snow: but within there was no appearance that any person had been there; though Althea thought that this room, lighted by a window projecting from the thick wall (and where an old helmet, a halbert, a pair of gauntlets, and a rusty pike over the great chimney, were the only movables that appeared), was the most desolate and gloomy part of the whole house. She was now satisfied, however, that all the fears she had entertained in common with Mrs. Wansford were unfounded; and that the dog she had seen was, as Wansford had assured her, a brown terrier which belonged to some of the neighbours, and which he had often seen about the buildings.

“ He comes, I suppose,” said he, carelessly, when Althea mentioned the circumstance, “ after the vermin, of which there is enough about this old place besides rats, which make it impossible
for

for me to keep any thing in any of these rooms, there are stoats or weasels that breed about the holes in the battered walls. I saw one of them t'other day run across the passage."

Althea remembering this, and finding not only the appearance of the animal she had seen accounted for, but the noises also which alarmed the lurking superstition of Mrs. Wansford, no longer felt any reluctance to renew her walks in this great room. Here the good woman of the house, on Althea's report, agreed again to hang her clothes after a great wash.

"It dries," says she, "there, as well as if 'twas out upon the green; and then no wet can trouble us—so that it would be a thousand pities to give up such a convenient place."

From this period the gardening of the children, and the œconomy of their mother's bleaching operations, occasioned the room to be frequently visited,

Some days passed without any remarkable occurrence: Althea visited her old friend Mrs. Mosely, and was surpris'd to find that no letter had been received from Mrs. Marchmont. In conversation with the ancient woman, Althea related the strange circumstance of Vampyre's inquiry at Eastwoodleigh. Mrs. Mosely answered coldly, that she had heard of it; and immediately transferring the discourse, from the oddness of the visit, to the character of the man who had made it, she said, that he was accounted the greatest rogue within three counties—"Aye, Miss, and as I believe in all England—I hope it does not produce his fellow."

With the usual garrulity of her age, Mrs. Mosely then began to tell several stories about him that had happened within her own knowledge; by which it appear'd, that certain ruin followed wherever this disgrace to his profession and to human nature once infix'd his empoisoned

empoisoned fangs; and that his insidious friendship was not less fatal to his employers, who were always his dupes, than was his enmity to those against whom they engaged him.

“Many,” said she, “aye, very many are the poor people whom he has undone—who have died in jail—and whose children have been turned out to beggary, or have gone to the parish. . . But, alas-a-day! nobody had more reason to know what a cruel villain he was than my late dear master; and sure I am, that Sir Audley Dacres could never know what a hard thing he did when he put any matters against Mr. Marchmont into the management of this man. If it had not been for that, perhaps—but what is the use now of talking? What is to be, is to be; and what God pleases to direct is for the best.”

Althea was too much hurt at the idea that her father had accelerated the ruin of Mr. Marchmont's family, to continue

the conversation. She bade her solitary friend a good evening, therefore, and walked pensively homeward, reflecting how strange it was, that, in a country celebrated for its equal laws, a set of men should exist, who, when they are dishonest, contrive by means of the abuse of those laws to inflict more miseries on individuals than can otherwise be produced in human life, save only those which follow the absurdity, madness, and wickedness of war.

CHAP. V.

One out of suits with fortune.

THOUGH spring now visibly advanced, there were still many disagreeable and variable days before it was probable Althea could make those excursions into the country around, which promised her the only pleasure it was likely to afford her.—The afternoons now grew long, but there was little temptation to walk—unless in the banqueting-room or gallery, taking a book with her. Thither she was generally accompanied by the little Wansfords, whose cheerful voices as they ran about relieved (without disturbing her
F 3 meditations)

meditations) that mournful stillness which would otherwise have reigned in the deserted rooms—stillness, unbroken but by the evening song of the robin, or, at a distance in the fields, the first low chant of the thrush, which at this season is heard almost singly to sing his faint vespers to the yet remote sun.

It happened that Althea had one day received a letter from Linda Everfley, who, having very unexpectedly been carried to London by a relation, was intoxicated with the pleasure and dissipation into which, during her short stay there, she was permitted to enter; and she wrote to Althea a long detail of all she had seen, with a lively description of the parties she anticipated.

Far from feeling any thing like envy, Althea rejoiced in the satisfaction of her friend; yet, as she traversed the gallery, she could hardly help some involuntary comparisons between *her* situation and that of most other young women. It was

was true that it was her own choice; but she could scarce refrain from thinking Sir Audley cruel, in having given her no other alternative than this dreary seclusion, or a marriage with a man she detested. Her reflections were not cheerful; the afternoon was cold with a north-east wind; and she was on the point of returning to her parlour, when the eldest of Wansford's children, a girl between nine and ten years old, who had been hiding about in the empty rooms with her brother, came running on tiptoe to Althea, and, pale and trembling, whispered to her, that looking through a window in one of the closets which had a view into the end room, of that side where she thought her brother was seeking for her, she saw a man, who stood leaning near the chimney.—Althea, at once recollecting, or fancying, that this was the room of which so many stories were believed, turned as white as her little alarmist—“Surely, Nancy,”

said she, "surely you fancy this?—Where is your brother?—Perhaps you merely saw him, while he staid to surprize you?"

"Oh, no; indeed," cried the child, "it is no fancy. I saw the man as plain as I see you, I am sure I did.—Oh! let us go call somebody."

"I believe indeed," said Althea, "we had better go—but, let us see for your brother first—he must not be left here."

"Oh! perhaps this man will kill him," cried the girl.—"Oh, dear Miss, I am so afraid! Pray call my brother—pray let us go."

Confused and harassed by the wild expressions of fear which the child very naturally uttered, Althea knew not whether to go or stay. She was by no means weakly timid, yet her courage was unequal to the undertaking of verifying whether the apprehensions of the terrified girl were well founded.—She now listened a moment in breathless silence;
and

and then they heard the boy cry, Whoop!—as a signal to his sister, that, wearied with looking for her, he was hid; and that it was her turn to find him.—Nancy now cried out, as loudly as her apprehensions would let her, that she could play no more, and that they were going.—The boy heard her, and came running down the opposite passage to that from which the closet opened where his sister had been; and Althea, bidding them both go down stairs, was following them as fast as her trembling knees would permit, when *she* distinctly heard a door open—and then footsteps follow her towards the head of the stairs.—She hastened on, not daring to look behind her—but was hardly got to the landing-place of the great stair-case (while the two children, for the girl had communicated her alarm to the other, ran swiftly through the hall) before she heard a voice, which said in a half whisper—“Madam! Ma-

dam!—Miss Dacres!—hear me but a moment—I beg of you not to be alarmed!”

Althea, holding by the baluster, looked up. She saw, standing on the top of the stairs, a figure, of which, as his back was to the light which came from the open door of the gallery, she could not distinguish the face.—She was now alone in the house (for the children were already out of hearing); and in a state of mind difficult to describe, she hesitated a moment whether she should stop to hear what this man had to say, or fly. It was evident that he knew her—his voice and manner were such as seemed not to indicate any evil design. Rapidly these ideas passed through her mind—while the person, perceiving that she wavered, approached her.—Althea still descending the stairs, though with less speed—he spoke to her again.—“Miss Dacres,” said he, “will not surely refuse to hear, for one moment,

moment, an unhappy man, whose life is, perhaps, in her power?"

She now saw his face, and became riveted to the place where she stood; for through some change, which she was in too much confusion to consider, she recollected the features and voice of Marchmont.

The immediate terror for herself was now suspended—surprise, and fear of some disaster to him—a thousand sensations, which it was impossible to investigate, prevented her speaking; but as she no longer testified any inclination to escape from him, Marchmont descended the rest of the stairs, and, approaching her with the air of a man still afraid of offending or alarming her, said—"The children, whose alarm I heard, will probably bring some persons hither before I can explain myself. My situation is as extraordinary as it is distressing; nor is it, Miss Dacres, the least painful of many sad
F 6 reflections,

reflections, that I have occasioned to you, as I know I have, uneasiness and alarm. You will, however, I am sure, do me the justice to believe, that I am not concealed thus like a robber, amidst the ruins of my father's house, with any ill intentions—but through misfortunes that have driven me from society."

He was proceeding, when voices were heard without the great entrance.—“I shall be discovered,” cried he, “and the evils which for the sake of others I have suffered so much to avoid must now come upon me!”

“For God's sake, Sir,” cried Althea, “do not hazard it—return, I implore you, to your concealment—I will endeavour to divert whatever enquiries may be made.”

“You are all goodnes,” said Marchmont.—“I have seen enough to convince me that your humanity, your excellent heart may be depended upon.

The

The higher my admiration of so much virtue arises, the more ardently I wish to vindicate myself from the suspicions to which this strange concealment may give occasion. I believe it is in my power effectually to escape from any present pursuit, by ways known only to myself; but I cannot go till you condescend to promise me the honour of five minutes conversation once again. Tell me—may I hope for it, Madam?"

The voices became louder and nearer, calling Miss Dacres!—Althea, hardly knowing what she said, and dreading to see this unhappy young man liable to the misfortunes that must follow his detection, answered, with a trembling voice, "That she would be in the banqueting-room about the same hour the next day."

Marchmont, thanking her rather by a look than by words, instantly disappeared; and Althea, who imagined, by the voices of the people of the house,
that

that they were afraid of entering the hall, crossed it as swiftly as she could, and near the door met Nancy, who with the maid, and a labourer they had called from the neighbouring barn, were waiting without the effect of repeating her name, for to enter the house was an undertaking they dared not venture upon. Her countenance was evidence enough, even to such observers, of the terror she had been in—but making an effort to assume composure, she enquired what was the matter?

Hannah then explained, that, frightened out of her wits by the report of the children, who said they had seen a man in the house who would certainly kill Miss Dacres, she had called Thomas from the barn, and they had come to see how they could help her.

Althea, who could not help thinking what such assistance would have done for her had there really been danger, now attempted, as the only means to prevent

prevent a farther discovery, to persuade the child to believe she had been mistaken.—“ You are fanciful, Nancy,” said she, “ and must learn not to give way to such silly fears. There was *no* man where you supposed. I went myself to see, and I am sorry you have so needlessly called any body.”—She then walked quietly into the other wing of the house, observing that Thomas, who remained behind to fasten the great door, trembled as he did it, and hastened after them as quick as possible, looking up to the windows with every mark of fear and consternation. When he overtook Althea, he seemed to survey her with marks of astonishment, as one who had more courage than belonged to her; and he whispered to Hannah, that, whatever Miss might say, he was sure little Nanny had seen something:—“ I know well enough,” added he, “ what my own mother have told me, of strange things
she

she knewed—when she lived ous-maid with the 'squire.'"

Althea, still breathless, as well from the effects of fear as from her endeavours to hide her emotion, hastened to her own apartment, and, shutting herself in, recalled, with increasing astonishment, the circumstances of a discovery so extraordinary.

It happened that neither Wansford nor his wife was at home; the former, having some business at the town about five miles off, had gone thither early in the day, and on account of his lameness was accompanied by his wife. They were now, however, every moment expected to return; and Althea had to consider how she was to act to conceal from them what she doubted not their daughter's account would engage them to enquire into. Over the simple spirit of such a child she imagined it possible that she might have influence enough,

to

to convince her she was mistaken; but as it was not likely the alarm the child had received, and communicated to others, should not be known to her mother, Althea thought it would be difficult, if not impossible, long to evade her enquiries, or appease those fears to which the good woman was naturally prone.

Leaving this therefore to settle itself, Althea began to reflect on what Marchmont had requested of her, and on the extraordinary circumstances of his concealment and appearance. There was now no doubt but that, in consequence of those debts so unhappily though so piously incurred, Marchmont was reduced to the sad necessity of seeking this dreary asylum against his merciless creditors; and it was equally certain that it was of him, Vampyre and his myrmidons were in pursuit. A thousand fears for his final safety, now mingled themselves with detestation of that ruffian who molested him, and pity
for

for the forlorn condition to which he was reduced. Sometimes she doubted the propriety of her keeping the hasty appointment she had made—yet her generous sensibility would not allow her to evade it: she considered, that Marchmont would hardly have asked it if he had not believed she could render him some friendly service, and she remembered how anxiously she had wished for means and opportunity of relieving his unhappy family. As to the latent partiality she had felt for him, she had yet hardly trusted herself to ask what it meant; or, rather, she imputed entirely to pity for his unmerited misfortunes, that complacency with which she had accustomed herself to think of him since their accidental interview at Capelstoke.

She determined then to keep her promise, which she thought it could not be improper to do. It was impossible Marchmont could have any evil design; and whatever might be the imprudence
of

of meeting thus a person almost a stranger to her, she had no satirical remarks from others to fear, and her own heart told her, that she meant only to obey the dictates of humanity and benevolence. It was true, that young women of her age are not, according to the established rules, to trust themselves with persons who may presume upon their condescension:—but Althea considered herself as placed in a singular situation, where mere forms might be dispensed with; and she looked on Marchmont as a young man who could not have any other claims to attention from her, than those which every human creature in distress has on his fellow being.

Having calmed her mind, and taken her resolution, she awaited the return of her host and hostess; who no sooner arrived at home, than their little girl began to tell her mother the terror she had been in—and to relate also, that

Miss

Miss Dacres seemed sadly frightened at first, but afterwards went herself to look, and said it was nothing—no, nothing in the world but her fancy!

Wansford, who had invariably discouraged such fears, and who had come home fatigued and out of humour, scolded first at the girl, and then at the mother, who had, he said, put such a parcel of nonsense in the poor child's head, that she would grow up fit for nothing at all, and never be qualified to earn her bread in the world. He then sternly bade her be silent; and his wife, as well as his children, knowing the necessity of obedience, the story seemed likely to be stifled for the present; but before Mrs. Wansford went to bed, she could not help gliding into Althea's room, to hear what she said to Nancy's story. After she had related what the child had told her, with many exaggerations, Althea quietly answered, that it was very true she had been at first
alarmed

alarmed at the little girl's report; "for I fancied," said she, "that those horrid men, who were here the other day, might have got into the house; but, on going to the place, I was convinced there was nobody—I am persuaded she saw only her brother.—It was dusk, and some of the stories she had heard were in Nancy's head. You had better not encourage her in any of these fears: in this instance, I assure you, they are groundless, for I examined into the foundation of her apprehensions myself."

Mrs. Wansford shuddered at this exertion of courage, and left her—far from being convinced that Nanny had been mistaken.

CHAP. VI.

Io sol, fra viventi
L'afilo, non ho!

AS the hour approached on which Althea had promised to meet Marchmont, she became so apprehensive and uneasy, that she could not for a moment remain in the same place, but traversed the inhabited rooms with such visible inquietude, that, had not Mrs. Wansford been at that time busied more than usual, she must have observed it. At any other period some contrivance would have been necessary to shake off the attendance of the children, who were accustomed to follow her when she

She went for her evening walks in the garden or gallery; but now the impression of fear was so recent on their minds, that, instead of importuning her for permission to accompany her, they kept close to their mother, and Althea, with a beating heart, walked slowly and unobserved towards the great door of the old hall, which was, she believed, the only entrance to the deserted buildings. On reaching it, however, she stopped; recollecting, at that moment, that she neither knew how to open the door, nor probably had strength to do it. She hesitated; but not long, for footsteps were heard within, and the door was opened by Marchmont.

Althea stepped hastily in, but she could not speak. Marchmont closed after her the great heavy door, and the noise of its shutting re-echoed through the vacant rooms.

Amidst the deep dejection that visibly hung over him, a gleam of pleasure lightened

lightened in the eyes of Marchmont; yet hardly did he venture to express what he felt, before it seemed lost in sad reflections on his condition, and how different a reception he was giving to Miss Dacres from what he might have done under other circumstances. He was in the place where his ancestors had dwelt in affluence and in honour; but *he* was himself a wretched wanderer, concealed like a culprit; receiving a visit of charity and compassion from a young woman, in whom, as he plainly saw by her countenance and manner, commiseration was not unmingled with terror. Sensations so full of pain and mortification he endeavoured to subdue; and in a manner the most respectful, though his voice trembled as he spoke, he thanked her for her goodness and condescension.—“ In this wretched scene of desolation,” said he, “ *where* can I ask Miss Dacres to honour me with her attention ?”

Althea,

Althea, who perceived how much he was affected, answered, with a faint attempt to look cheerful, that place was altogether immaterial: adding—"If you, Sir, have, as I suspect, resided here some time in the present condition of the house, it cannot surely be any great hardship for *me* to remain, at least as long as may suffice for me to hear how I can be fortunate enough to do you any service."

"I will not," replied Marchmont, as he led the way up to the great room where Althea usually walked—"I will not attempt, Madam, to express how deeply I am sensible of your goodness and condescension. The first moment I saw you, I believed all I have since found to be true of your character.—Your charity to the poor old servant who has shared the calamities of my family, made the deepest impression on my mind. With her I found a temporary asylum; and from her I heard, that

Miss Dacres had even the humanity to interest herself for my mother, for my sisters; who, in common with myself, have no other recommendation to her than what we have acquired by misfortune!—Do not, however, imagine that my knowledge of this your tenderness of disposition has engaged me to intrude upon it. I know your situation: I honour, I reverence the noble principles on which you have preferred a residence in this now dreary and sequestered spot, to the highest affluence and prosperity. Long, long may that courage, so consistent with female tenderness and female dignity, support you in your honourable resistance!”

The vehemence with which this sentence was spoken, rendered it very unlike what would have been uttered by the calm voice of disinterested friendship. Marchmont seemed himself conscious of it, and, as if he had been betrayed into an indiscretion, paused

to

you, I could not determine to throw myself upon my fate, without attempting to appease those alarms which my enforced concealment, added to the legends which always belong to such houses as this, have very naturally contributed to give, even to a mind guarded, as I am sure yours, Madam, is, by reason and reflection. I cannot render this forsaken place worthy of one who would be the loveliest ornament of a palace; but, by explaining what I know must have given you occasional inquietude, I may at least prevent those apprehensions which must lend additional gloom to these forlorn scenes. May I also without presumption add, that, amid the misfortunes which I go to meet, I shall feel a great satisfaction in knowing that my conduct, which I know has been, and will be still more misrepresented, is at least explained to one on whose good opinion I set infinite value? and that, perhaps, while I am

am

am condemned by many, unpitied by others, and neglected by all, Miss Dacres will not think that misfortune is guilt, and will remember me with some concern."—His heart seemed now almost too full for utterance; but he recovered himself instantly, and went on:

"It is not to many people I would *appeal* for their pity—it is not from many people I would *accept* it. But *yours*, Miss Dacres, will be most soothing to a heart which is even at this early period of life outraged by a cruel world. And alas, Madam! driven as I am from my family, not allowed even to afford them the protection they want; an exile from society, and compelled either to live as a wretched vagabond, or submit to see my whole life wasted within the walls of a prison—it is long since I have dared to seek the sad consolation of relating my sorrows; long since I have heard one friendly sentence, unless from that helpless solitary old servant

whose wants you have with so much humanity supplied. I believe you are acquainted with some of those circumstances which have reduced my family, from affluence as great as is often enjoyed by private gentlemen, to the state we are now in. Since the death of my poor father I have lived in a continual struggle with adversity. It will, it must at length overwhelm me. But if I could have saved my mother, my sisters, amidst the wreck, I should not have devoted myself in vain! Believe me, Miss Dacres, no interest less dear than theirs, should have compelled me to submit to the disgrace of thus ignominiously skulking from the pursuit of the harpies, who have a legal right to take from me—almost all I possess—the privilege of breathing the air, and seeing the light of Heaven. But I have been flattered by hopes; I have been lured into this degrading concealment by the expectation that a little time might appease the malignity of my pursuers;

purfuers; that they would be prevailed upon, by the interposition of Mr. Everfley (the only friend who has, as far as was in his power, adhered to me), to give me time to try what I can do for their fatisfaction by my induftry. To await the event of his attempts I fubmitted to hide myfelf, though he was not himfelf acquainted with, or even fufpected, the place of my retreat. But my poor mother, who alone was privy to it, has very lately acquainted me that the two creditors who purfue me with fo much rancour are now more inveterate than ever. And indeed I knew I had little to expect from their mercy, when I found that, while they appeared to liften to the mediation of Mr. Everfley, they let loofe upon me that *fiend*, who, in the fhape of an attorney, embittered the laft sad moments of my father; and, before his poor remains were conveyed to their place of reft, had taken meafures to turn into the world unshel-

tered and penniless his widow and his children—that *miserable* (for it debases the species to call him man), who advised them to stop the cold ashes of my parent in their way to interment; and to accept no terms but those of my binding myself for the debt, which he believed my friends would pay rather than that I should be hurried to prison.”

“And this wretch,” said Althea, taking advantage of a short pause, “this Vampyre was, I fear, *first* empowered to pursue and oppress you by my father, by Sir Audley Dacres?”

“Not exactly so,” replied Marchmont. “The villain was one of many of those agents whom the father of the present Lady Dacres was used to employ in his money transactions, one of which you know put his heiress, and in her right Sir Audley, into possession of this house and estate. I do not blame Sir Audley himself, because, had he from any motives of generosity been disposed to

to remove the affairs that concerned us from the harpy talons of this venomous reptile, he might not have had it in his power; for never yet was the wretch known to relinquish an employment, while he could by chicane and fraud extort a guinea from his employer. And indeed, had it been otherwise, I had no claim on the forbearance of Sir Audley Dacres. He never gave me encouragement to hope for his favour; he saw me unfortunate, and it requires more time than he probably had to spare to distinguish *imprudence* from *misfortune*. There are, to whom poverty always wears the semblance of blame."

Althea sighed deeply, but did not interrupt him.

"I do not however mean to say," continued Marchmont, "that Sir Audley is of that disposition. His being so nearly related to Miss Dacres would for ever make him respectable in my eyes.

But pardon me, I wander from my subject——

“ Vampyre, this attorney, was empowered to arrest me; and he must, I believe, have employed under some false pretence, and engaged by the promise of considerable reward, the myrmidons of the police, or he could never have traced me as he did to the cottage of Mrs. Mofely; where I had hardly been concealed a week, before I found it was besieged by that unfeeling species of the satellites of law who live on the miseries of the unhappy debtor. I had no counsel but a sick and feeble old woman, who, when she found that to be safe in her little hovel was impossible, advised me to have recourse to the parts of this house which had been contrived to conceal fugitives of a very different description. I knew them well, and was, perhaps, the only person who *did* know them. Ah! how little I ever thought, in the happy days of my childhood and
early

early youth, that I should ever linger about the passages which I had frequently explored with a sort of melancholy curiosity, as the asylum of the ruined Cavaliers, and even the unhappy exiles of royal blood, whose history I have often considered with pain, mingled with a degree of that hereditary pride which my father had perhaps too much pleasure in encouraging; while I reflected on the share *my* family had in scenes which I do not now see quite in the same light as I was then taught to behold them!

“ I dared not then, Madam, I dared not implore *your* assistance, though from your humanity towards poor Mofely I believed I should have found it; but to secure the coincidence of Mr. Wansford was absolutely necessary. He had the character of an honest man—I knew he had been a faithful servant in your family during the life of your mother. Something was to be hazarded; and I was so beset by the followers of Vam-

pyre, that no other escape appeared practicable. I ventured then to entrust to Wansford the truth of my situation. The man heard it with that disposition which belongs to an unadulterated English spirit. He detested the malignant tyranny of the two rich men, who without any possible advantage to themselves pursued me merely to gratify the rage of disappointed avarice. He had himself suffered from some of the lower retainers of the law. He knew enough of Vampyre's character to hold him in that sort of abhorrence which an honest mind feels towards cunning and cruelty; and he saw no prejudice that could happen to himself from affording me the asylum I asked, which was merely permission to bring a mattress and bed-clothes into one of those small recesses (for they can hardly be called rooms), which have been contrived amid the thick walls of this old building. There are three of them, wide of each other, but communicating

nicating by passages so narrow as to admit but one person at a time, and in some places by steps so steep that only an active man could pass them. Into the least damp of these I contrived, by the assistance, or rather the connivance, of Wansford, to convey some straw, a mattress, and such other necessaries as might secure from the effects of great cold and humidity a man brought up to a more delicate manner of life than he has lately been accustomed to. Adversity is an excellent and radical cure for the errors that fond parents often commit in the education of an only son.

“ By the same means the faithful servant who was brought up with me from a boy, and on whom I cannot prevail to seek another master, conveyed to me requisite food. He equipped himself in a round frock, cut off his hair, and exchanged his usual clothes for the coarsest of those worn by the peasants; and thus
changed

changed in appearance, he passed for the nephew of Mrs. Mosely, and took a lodging in the next village, from whence he used to creep of a night with such food as he could purchase without suspicion, going, or rather pretending to go, during the day, to his labour in a distant parish.

“ It is now a month since I embraced this manner of life, rather in compliance with the wishes of my mother. than because I preferred it myself to the imprisonment that awaits me. But the visit that about ten days since that blood-hound Vampyre paid to my humane protector Wansford, left hardly any doubt but that I had been traced hither: and though the resolute refusal of Wansford to admit those wretches to search the house has made their success rather more remote and difficult; yet, having once got scent of me, I know it cannot be long before I must either quit my concealment, or be taken in it.”

Althea

Althea now, in a tremulous voice that marked how much she was affected, enquired whether, since the private passages and retreats in the house were so secure from the visits of those who were not acquainted with them, he might not still remain undiscovered?

Marchmont replied, "I possibly might, though the existence of such hiding-places is too well known to make them very secure against a strict search; but I fear," added he, with a faint attempt at cheerfulness, "that the siege would inevitably be turned to a blockade, and that the garrison would be starved into a surrender; for my poor purveyor, Fenchurch, has lately been alarmed with an account, that as he is a stranger he is believed to be a deserter from Plymouth; and that a man who is employed in the impress service at a village on the sea-coast has declared it shall soon be seen *what* he is. This must be a manœuvre of Vampyre's. The poor fellow, though there

there is no difficulty or danger that he would not encounter in my service, is terrified at the idea of being forced away, and detained on board ship—while, my supplies failing in his absence, I must quit my concealment, and yield without farther resistance to my pursuers.”

Althea heard with increasing concern this threatened accumulation of calamity. Marchmont continued to speak.

“ Already, perhaps, my unfortunate companion in adverse fortune may have fallen into the snare; for since the evening before yesterday he has not appeared.”

“ Good God!” exclaimed Althea, “ you have been, and are then, perhaps, without necessary sustenance?”

“ Not altogether so—I never was so improvident as to be wholly without; for I foresaw that many accidents might happen to impede punctual supplies. I have not, it is true, fared very sumptuously: but why should not I, who am
reduced

reduced to a condition even below that of the peasant who labours for his daily bread, but who is free and independent—why should not I learn to live as scantily as he does?”

Though he said this in a cheerful voice, Althea, looking at him as he spoke, could hardly refrain from tears.

“Will you allow me,” said she, “to send you (unless I may invite you to share it in my parlour) a part of my supper? I beg your pardon for using the word *send*—I would not for the world hazard any thing of that sort—but will you suffer me to *bring* you some kind of food, better than I fear you can now have? Consider me, Sir, as one of your sisters, and believe that neither of them could be more rejoiced than I shall be to contribute such relief as can now be found in a situation so painful, and which you so little merit.”

While she spoke thus, Marchmont gazed at her with an expression in his countenance,

countenance, to which words can do but little justice.

“ It seems,” said he in a low voice, “ it seems as if the heaviest evils of life are mitigated and softened—perhaps that they may be the longer endured. Your generous compassion, Madam, would be a panacea for greater evils than *I* endure: but, when it becomes painful to you, as I think I plainly perceive it is, I dare not ask its continuance. I ought rather to withdraw myself, and to intrude upon you no more. . . .”

As if unable to go on, he now paused—while Althea, who fancied she heard footsteps below, and trembled lest he should be surpris'd, besought him eagerly not to think of any thing but his own safety.

“ If,” said she, “ your servant should have been taken, as his long absence makes but too probable, may it not lead to a discovery?—At the very idea of the wretch whom I saw the other day,
my

my soul recoils. Every thing is surely to be endured rather than that you should be in his power. Tell me, Sir, I beg of you, what you propose?—what I can do for you?”

The voice of Althea betrayed her agitation, and Marchmont recovered himself.

“ I am ashamed,” said he, “ of my weakness; and shocked that I have thus disturbed you. You ask me, most amiable Miss Dacres, what is my design? Alas! I would ask counsel of you; for in truth I know not how to act. For my mother’s sake, whose heart will be quite broken by my imprisonment, I would avoid it—but, alas! how?—If Fenchurch is taken, as I very much fear, I cannot remain here—and even if he has been detained only by some accident, I believe my concealment is now too much suspected long to avail me. I would quit it, therefore, in the night, and, making my way to the nearest sea-port, endeavour

endeavour to escape from the inhuman pursuit of men, with whom my surrender can gratify no passion but vengeance.— Yet even to this there are objections. . . . Indeed I know not how I could leave England but as a soldier or a sailor; and to my becoming either one or the other, it seems as if my mother had almost as strong objections as against my incurring the horrors of perpetual confinement.”

Althea too well understood, however he evaded naming, the reasons that prevented his quitting England otherwise than in some military capacity—that he had neither means of paying for his passage, nor his support, whithersoever he might be driven.

She now ran over in her mind, though in a hurried way, the possibility of her assisting him in this cruel exigence—but again fancying she heard persons walking beneath the windows of the room, and seeing it was already evening, and that it would be impossible for him to determine

mine on any plan that night, she became solicitous for his present security, and that he might not be longer a sufferer, from the absence of his servant, as to the actual necessaries of life. Collecting, therefore, all her courage, she said,

“ Allow me, Sir, to propose to you to return for this night to your sad cell—to-morrow morning I will do myself the pleasure of seeing you again, if you will permit me; and in the mean time pray tell me, if you can devise any safe way by which necessary food may immediately be conveyed to you?”

“ How very good you are,” said Marchmont, “ to be my purveyor! and how little do I deserve such kindness from you, to whom I know I have long been a source of fear, and am now likely to be the cause of trouble! Be not alarmed,” added he, seeing by her countenance that she apprehended some intrusion, “ I believe I am pretty secure for this evening; and since your long absence

fence may perhaps raise some uneasiness in the good woman of the house (from whom, for what reason I know not, her husband seems very anxious to keep the secret of my concealment), I will most thankfully accept your generous proposal of half an hour's conversation to-morrow morning: and now, if you have courage to trust yourself with me, I will shew you a way by which, without going through the hall, or any of the visible passages, this part of the house has a communication with that you inhabit. Althea professing her readiness to follow him, since she thought it less hazardous for him than her being let out at the hall door, he removed the damaged picture, which, as has been mentioned, rested against the wainscot in the banqueting-room; and, pushing aside a panel of the lower part of it, a dark and narrow passage appeared, just capable of admitting one person at a time. Marchmont descended into it by two deep steps; and

Althea,

Althea, not without some dread, which, however, she was ashamed of, followed him.

He led her along an avenue, equally dark and narrow, into a room which was not among those she had been shewn by Mrs. Mosely, but more gloomy than any of them, and the evening was now closing in. Marchmont felt her hand tremble as he held it, and said—

“How much I am obliged to you for your noble confidence! I fear this way is very unpleasant to you; but, however, it is very short.”

So saying, he opened the door of what appeared to be a large old wainscot press; and urging with some force his foot against the side, it gave way, and delivered them into another obscure but short passage, and from thence into the room where Wansford kept his small stores, such as malt, winter roots, and wheat, which he had by various contrivances

trivances secured from the vermin that the house was infested with.

“ You see,” cried Marchmont, “ that I am not so destitute of the power of procuring provisions as you imagined; and that here, like a true prodigal, I might feed on husks and on roots.”

Althea could not answer his pleasantry, so deeply was she affected by his situation; but she eagerly enquired whether, by this avenue, Wansford could not convey him food?

“ I have never yet proposed it,” answered he, “ because I have never yet been quite destitute; and I knew it was hardly possible for him constantly to supply me, without betraying to his wife a secret which he seemed to dread her knowing.”

“ But to-night,” said Althea, “ may I leave here what you have undoubtedly occasion for?”

“ I certainly shall not die of repletion,” answered he, “ if I do not receive

ceive your bounty; for my fare has been to-day and yesterday rather harder than usual: but if I go supperless to bed, fate will not deal worse with me than she does continually with those who have toiled all day."

Althea however, finding that she could thus supply him, insisted upon his remaining concealed near the room till she could return; and then with a palpitating heart hastened to her own bed-chamber; where taking off her hat and cloak, she affected to go down to her parlour, as if just returned from walking, and, ringing the bell, ordered her supper.

Mrs. Wansford, who immediately attended, expressed some wonder at her staying out so late, and still more that she had not heard her come in. Althea gave slight answers to her questions; and saying that she had been for a long walk, which had given her an unusual appetite, Mrs. Wansford bestirred herself to pro-

duce such cold provisions as she had. Althea having concealed as much of them as she could, sent the rest away, and under pretence of fatigue hastened to her room. Then, after a moment's pause, with light but faltering steps, she hurried towards that where Marchmont waited for her; for, knowing that Mrs. Wansford's fears prevented her ever visiting this room, he had not concealed himself. He would have thanked his trembling benefactress; but she entreated him, in a whisper, not to speak; and glided as swiftly as possible away; fearing lest her hostess, whose bed-room was at the opposite end of the passage, should discover her before she could make good her retreat.

CHAP. VII.

Povera affetti miei !
Se non fanno impetrar dal tuo bel core
Pieta, se non amore!

ALONE in her own room, Althea collected her confused and dissipated thoughts. The first surprise she had felt now gave way to the pity, respect, and apprehension for his safety, with which the manner and the narrative of Marchmont had inspired her, mingled with a sense of the impropriety of her own situation; of which she would probably have been less painfully sensible, had she not been conscious that there was something more than compassion in

the extreme concern she felt for Marchmont.

Besides the too great probability there was, that the fiend who hung with such unappealable rancour on the pursuit would soon force him from his concealment, Althea dreaded lest even from that remote spot the whisper of malignity might reach her father and Lady Dacres; and should that happen, it might be of the utmost prejudice to Marchmont, and create in regard to herself suspicions and opinions which it might never afterwards be in her power to obliterate.

A young man of Marchmont's description concealed for a long space of time in a house of which she was the ostensible inhabitant, must give rise to much scandal were it known; and since it was suspected by Vampyre, it was but too probable that he would assert it, and convey the assertion somehow or other to Sir Audley (to whom indeed he was known),

known), in the hope that by the means of his interference Marchmont might be driven from his asylum, and, by the displeasure his seeking it might create, raise another powerful and vindictive enemy in the person of Sir Audley Dacres.

Tormented and perplexed by these thoughts, Althea could not determine what advice she should give to the unfortunate fugitive. It seemed best to propose his quitting England—yet where could he obtain money, and whither should he go?—The latter question it was, perhaps, easier to answer, even in the present confused state of affairs on the continent, than it was to say, where he should find the means of conveying himself thither—since, though he did not confess it, she was convinced by his manner that his pecuniary exigences were such as made his attempting such a journey impossible.

With that timid deference to the opinion of the world, which is an amiable feature in the character of a young woman, Althea had also that strength of mind that enabled her to be decided when her understanding and conscience told her she was right. In considering, therefore, how far she could in this way assist him, she put aside every other reflection but that of the pleasure it would give her to rescue a fellow-creature from so cruel a fate as that which hung over Marchmont. For any deserving person she felt that she would have made the same exertion: yet she did not deny even to herself, that the personal merit of Marchmont, the promise of prosperous fortune so cruelly disappointed, his filial piety, and the fair expectations of his youth unhappily blasted, contributed to produce in his favour a more lively interest than she would have been sensible of for almost any other being.

On

On examining her stock of money, which since her residence at East Woodleigh she had but little diminished, she found it consisted of twelve guineas, and two Bank notes of twenty pounds each (the remains of fifty pounds, which she had been paid out of Mrs. Trevilian's property), and twenty-five which Sir Audley had given her for the expences of her journey: since which he had never sent her any supply, supposing (if he thought about it at all) that at Eastwoodleigh she could have no occasion for money; and it was true that, except her little charities, she had neither wish nor opportunities of indulging in any expence.

Of the sum then in her possession Althea could well spare five-and-forty guineas, which she thought might, with some small sum he probably possessed himself, be sufficient to secure the retreat of Marchmont to Holland or France. But she foresaw, that to offer it to him

would be a matter of extreme delicacy. She doubted whether any thing could engage him to accept it; and she foresaw that, if he did not, the supposition that remaining where he was, was disagreeable to her, would hasten his quitting Eastwoodleigh at whatever hazard;—an apprehension which acquired new force, as she recollected some of those broken sentences which, half uttering, he seemed suddenly to repress. They were indeed the effect of that undescribable variety of sensations which passed through his mind. He knew that, as far as related to Althea, his situation under the same roof was altogether improper; and to hazard any injury to her, no consideration that had for its object only his personal safety could have engaged him. Yet having once yielded to the pleasure of seeing her, and now of conversing with her; hearing her voice, and reading in her intelligent eyes that she was even more interested for him than

than she wished to avow, he had not courage to tear himself away, though conscious that to stay at all was improper—to stay long impossible:

While this contest continued in the breast of Marchmont, Althea was on her part studying how she might induce him to accept what she was sure he must greatly want; and no other means occurred to her, but to contrive that Wansford should convey it to him without his knowing from whence it came. This, however, was an expedient which she could not think of adopting without reluctance; and so many were the objections to it which arose, that at length she determined to postpone any arrangement of this matter till she had again seen and conversed with Marchmont.

She hastened, therefore, to this conference with every precaution that was necessary to mislead the curiosity of Mrs. Wansford, who believed her going to make one of her charitable visits at the

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cottage.

cottage. Marchmont was impatiently expecting her; and she was let into the hall unperceived by any of those whose observation she desired to avoid.

The comfortless state in which he had now so long remained, and anxiety which every hour increased, had occasioned, even since Althea parted with him the preceding night, a great alteration in the appearance of the unfortunate young man.—His eyes were hollow and sunk, his face pale, and Althea thought he seemed personally to suffer, though he did not complain. He addressed her with a melancholy solemnity, thanked her for this additional proof of her goodness of heart, and then said—

“ It is not fit, Miss Dacres, that so unfortunate a being as I am should trespass thus on that goodness. Since I had the honour of seeing you last, I have thoroughly considered my situation; and I have determined to submit to the ignominy of it no longer.—If such are the laws.

laws of my country, that from even an unoffending debtor as I am, nothing will satisfy those laws but that I should terminate my life in prison, there will be less disgrace surely in yielding to my destiny, than there is in the misery of thus shifting from place to place—a burden to the few who have humanity to be interested for me—a burden to myself.

“ My mother, my dear unhappy mother! will submit with fortitude when she knows the worst, and knows it to be unavoidable. To inevitable evils they say that the human mind most easily accommodates itself; and when I am confined she will learn, that our resistance is vain, and that our projects are at an end. She will be wretched, I know, but uncertainty and solicitude will be no more. I shall yet exist—I may see her and my poor sisters. Perhaps I may find means to subsist in confinement, as hundreds of others are known to subsist; and one chance will yet remain, towards which

my family may look with hope. At some period or other, if humanity should touch the hearts of those who have the power, at the instance of that generous * man who is the pride and honour of his country, an act of insolvency may release me—release me,” added he with a deep-drawn sigh, “to the privilege of being a beggar in the world at large!”

Althea heard him with the deepest concern, yet was by no means prepared to controvert his reasoning. After a moment's silence, however, she ventured timidly to enquire whether nothing could be thought of to avoid so painful, so sad an experiment, as that of putting himself into the hands of these pitiless men, to answer no possible purpose.

“Surely,” said she, “your friend Mr. Everfley might and would assist you.” For at that moment it occurred to Althea, that by his means she could con-

* It is hardly necessary to name Lord Moira.

vey to Marchmont the pecuniary help she wished to engage him to accept.

“ Eversley !” repeated Marchmont, with quickness—“ No—that cannot be. Eversley is an excellent man. I owe him a thousand obligations, but they have cost him too dear. I know how much uneasiness I have been the occasion of, and nothing on earth should induce me to repeat it—Besides, there are other reasons My friend is affluent indeed, but I do not envy him: Poor fellow! he is rather an object of pity. Destitute as I am, the fate of Eversley excites my compassion. He does not know, for I had many reasons for my concealment, where I now am.”

Althea was on the point of betraying herself, by saying that she heard he was in Ireland from Linda Eversley. But recollecting herself, she continued silent. Marchmont renewed the conversation.

versation. He even forced a languid smile as he said—

“ And suppose that the inveterate malignity of these men, who, like Shylock, insist upon their bond, which they know I cannot pay—suppose it urges them to the greatest extremities? I am of a race, of which many members have been imprisoned, though not indeed for quite the same cause. You recollect, perhaps, a beautiful little piece of poetry*, written
by

* In Wood's *Athenæ*, page 228, Vol. II. may be seen at large the affecting story of this elegant writer, who, having been distinguished for every gallant and polite accomplishment, the pattern of his own sex, and the darling of the ladies, died in the lowest obscurity, wretchedness, and want, in 1658.—Part of the Song follows :

“ When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at my grates :

When

a Colonel Richard Lovelace, who
 s imprisoned in the Gate-house at
 Westminster for adherence to his un-
 happy master. He was the brother of
 his father's grandmother. He died in
 that obscurity, and poverty. My fate
 and his may probably in many instances
 be alike."

Althea instantly recollected the lines,
 and the name of Althea, by which the
 fortunate Lovelace celebrates his mis-
 fortune; a coincidence which struck her
 with a thousand indescribable sensations;

When I lie tangled in her hair,
 And fetter'd with her eye,
 The birds that wanton in the air
 Know no such liberty.

- - - - -

Stone walls do not a prison make,
 Nor iron bars a cage;
 Minds innocent and quiet take
 That for an hermitage:
 If I have freedom in my love,
 And in my soul am free,
 Angels alone that soar above
 Enjoy such liberty."

though

though it was, she thought, possible that it was *not* on account of that coincidence brought forward by Marchmont. She felt, however, her cheeks dyed with blushes; and to conceal her confusion she passed lightly over the answer, and recurred again to Mr. Everfley.

“ Since you are so good,” said she, “ as to allow me to take an interest in a situation which even those who have not the pleasure of knowing you must lament, suffer me to consult with Mr. Everfley. I am no stranger to the restraint he labours under from the unhappy temper and narrow prejudices of his wife; but by means of his sister I am sure we may correspond on the possibility of serving you, without rendering him liable to her ill-humour.”

“ I cannot express, Miss Dacres,” interrupted Marchmont, “ how much I feel your goodness; but there are objections—invincible, unconquerable objections. . . . It is impossible,” added he,

he, "to trouble you with them: but be assured, that if I had any thing to hope from his friendship, without committing my friend, I would not hesitate:—as it is, I must take my resolution, and already I feel that I ought not to have given you the concern I have done. I am conscious that I have acted wrong—and yet, perhaps, if I dared relate at length the circumstances that have led me into this, the narrative might, to such a mind as yours, plead my apology."

"None is necessary, Sir," said Althea in a low voice; "I beg you will not think of me, unless it be how I can render you any service in regard to your present difficulties. I am very much afraid, from the detention of your servant, that they may multiply around you; and I own, my horror of the man they call Vampyre is such, that nothing would give me more pain than that he should make another visit here more successful than the last."

"For.

“For that reason,” replied Marchmont, “it were on all accounts wiser to meet, rather than to await the evil; and I trust I have, by reflection, so far subdued the rage and indignation that this villanous fellow used to excite, that I shall calmly acquiesce in an inevitable misfortune, without too much considering the infamous agent.”

“Surely,” said Althea, “it would be better were you to attempt escaping to the continent till some settlement can be brought about. I think I have heard you have relations in France?”

“Yes,” answered Marchmont; “a branch of my family are naturalized there. But if you consider, Madam, the ancestors from whom the Baron de Lavergnac is descended, you will immediately conclude, that if he still remains on his estate, of which I have many doubts, it is but little in his power to afford protection to a stranger—and a stranger, whose country alone would now render

render him liable to imprisonment. And whether I am to pass my life in the Fleet, or the Abbaye—whether I am to exist under the tyranny of Robespierre, or a victim to the chicanery of Vampyre, seems to me a matter so immaterial, that it ought not to induce me to cross the water to embrace the one, or escape the other. Indeed I have another objection, which is, that by going to the Baron de Lavernac, admitting it were possible to reach him, I should, perhaps, disturb the security which, from his age and retired habits of life, it is possible he may have been able to preserve, notwithstanding his decided abhorrence of the present rulers in France. It is now so many months since I have heard of him, or any part of his family, that perhaps while I speak of them they exist no longer. His son was in Spain when I had the last news of them. His grandson, a young man of two-and-twenty, had, till then, remained at Lavernac:
but

but notwithstanding all the inducements he had to continue at home, the anxious solicitude of the venerable old Baron, the agonizing fears of a mother who adores him, and probably the tender and seducing affection of a very lovely young woman, to whom he was seven or eight months ago on the point of being united; notwithstanding all these ties, I cannot but believe my younger relation has either joined his father, or found means to get into Italy or Germany. Would I knew where he is! I had rather join him, though our principles do not exactly accord, than wander about without any fixed purpose, or give to the kind-hearted old Baron another cause of anxiety. But indeed," continued Marchmont, after a short pause, "to go into the army as he is probably gone is in every man's power; and if my mother could be prevailed upon to hear of it with patience, why should it not be in mine?"

Althea,

Althea, from a certain uncomfortable feeling about her heart, doubted whether even the risk of long imprisonment was not preferable. The longer this conference lasted, the less prospect there appeared of her being able to execute those friendly projects on which she had meditated before they met: yet, while her hopes of being instrumental in saving him grew fainter, her wishes that she might do so acquired new force; and notwithstanding all there was to fear should his present abode become known to Sir Audley, she could not without extreme pain think of his delivering himself to the merciless men who pursued him. His uncertainty whither to go, if he could for a while escape them; the situation of every part of his own family, who in times more tranquil would have protected him; the unfeeling dereliction of his relations on the side of his mother, who had so much the power to befriend him; even the fortitude to which he endeavoured

endeavoured to give the appearance of calm indifference, while he prepared to meet the destiny which awaited him; all combined to increase the interest Althea took in that destiny. And why should it be concealed that the greatest, perhaps the only error he was guilty of, had no power to weaken this interest? Marchmont, far from saying it, did not certainly even acknowledge to himself, that the strangeness of his comfortless situation, as far as related to his concealment at Eastwoodleigh, was rather sought for on his part than avoided: and though he knew every circumstance relative to Althea's fortune, and that nothing was less likely ever to be within the reach of possibility, than that *he* could be listened to as a lover; yet so far had the strength of those impressions he had received in their former interviews got the better of his reason, that he could not forbear availing himself of
an

an opportunity to be near her—and adding to all the other misfortunes of his life, that of indulging a passion which he knew ought *not* to be successful.

When he had first consented to hide himself among the secret passages of his paternal house, he persuaded himself that he had no purpose in concealment but to escape from his persecutors, and to contemplate, without her having any idea of his being near her, this charming girl, in the exercise of all those virtues, of which he had already heard so much even before the grateful loquacity of Mrs. Mosely had made her the constant subject of panegyric. Marchmont imagined that it was possible to consider her as some being of a superior order, altogether out of his reach, but whose beneficence and beauty it was gratifying to contemplate. Consciousness of the impropriety of his being thus concealed under the same roof, was only an additional inducement to the strict vigilance he otherwise

otherwise meant to observe. He was sure of Wansford as long as he could pay him, nor indeed had he any reason to doubt his honesty or humanity; and he had almost exhausted his last resource to inflame, by the most powerful of all arguments, his natural aversion to attorneys, and the particular antipathy he knew Vampyre must create wherever he appeared. For some time he had resolution enough to adhere to the conduct he had determined upon; and for a while, the dreariness of his confinement, amidst the rigours of winter, was sweetened by a transient view of Althea from a window, by hearing her voice in the spacious passages, as she came into the deserted building, or by catching at a distance its sweeter sound, as she sang to her own playing amid the silence of a still evening. But insensibly he found, that the more he indulged this growing attachment, the more importunate were its demands; and
when,

when in consequence of her alarm arising from the sight of his dog, she for some days forbore to renew her walks in the gallery, his concealment became so intolerable to him, that he was on the point of leaving it; but Althea appeared again, and again the desolate apartments which he had so much reason to contemplate with an aching heart, appeared to him to be irradiated by the presence of an angel.

His faithful terrier, which had only once broke from the command he had over it, was then more strictly kept to his obedience; and Marchmont finding that Althea resumed her solitary exercise, determined to be so much on his guard, that nothing should betray him, while he might still be gratified by the pleasure of hearing her speak, or even by a distant view as she passed the end of the passages into which he had the means of looking as he lay hid. For this

purpose he had on the day he was discovered taking his station in a room whither he knew the legends of Mrs. Mofely would prevent her coming. The circumstance of the children's playing in a closet which had a window looking into it, he could not foresee: the alarm (which he distinctly heard) once given, numberless reasons, or what appeared to be reasons, concurred to determine him on appearing. The absence of his servant indeed made it a matter of self-preservation; but that alone would probably have influenced him less than the fear of having terrified Althea, and of seeing her no more; while her kindness in regard to his mother and sisters, of which Mrs. Mofely had informed him; the generous pity she had expressed when they met in the park at Capelstoke; her general character, and, in short, an impulse too strong to be resisted, were united to conquer all his prudent

prudent resolutions, and determined him to throw himself at her feet.

In the first conversation that followed, the tender compassion which she seemed to feel for him, and the ingenuous confidence she placed in him, were but too well calculated to increase a passion, which, as he never intended to speak of it to its object, he indulged because he thought it could hurt nobody but himself.

This second interview had nearly overcome his resolution; and nothing but reflecting on the cruelty and ingratitude of giving pain to that bosom which already felt so keenly for him as a friend, could have deterred him from following, with some more positive declaration of his sentiments, what half involuntarily escaped him about Colonel Lovelace. While he yet spoke to Althea, or listened to her compassionate proposals, his heart smote him for the concern he had thus inflicted on her.

CHAP. VIII.

Why, Courage then!—What cannot be avoided,
'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear!

IT required some contrivance on the part of Althea to obtain a long conference with Wansford without the knowledge of his wife. She effected it, however, and with hesitation and reluctance disclosed to him the knowledge she had gained of Marchmont's concealment.

—Althea was, unfortunately perhaps for her, a great reader of countenances—decidedly a disciple of Lavater's; she fancied that, as far as her small knowledge of the world allowed her to judge,
his

his science was by no means so chimerical or illusive as Sir Audley and many other men of the world held it to be; and she believed she had often discovered the thoughts of those with whom she conversed, when they least intended she should have any idea of them. Attentive therefore to the expression of the man's face to whom she was now talking, she imagined, amidst all the respect he expressed for her, that there was a lurking sneer, when he found how well she was acquainted with Marchmont's history, and how much interest she evidently took in it. This might be, and probably was, fancy; but Althea felt mortified and uneasy. She failed not to recollect how gross are the apprehensions of the lower ranks of people, and that, even with greater precipitance than influences those but a little above them in station (and often not at all more refined in understanding), they decide, that it is impossible

two young people of different sexes can converse together otherwise than as lovers.

To obviate this impression, which she saw, or believed she saw, that Wansford entertained, Althea spoke with peculiar earnestness on the necessity of Marchmont's going; to which Wansford heartily assented.—“Aye, my dear young lady!” said he, “you don't know half the danger. I heard last night that Vampyre was at T*****, which is, you know, but seven miles off, or so—and what can a want there? I don't know, for my part, what's to be done! The poor young man cannot be hid much longer, that's for certain; but if he offers for to go—ah! he'll be taken by some of that old villain's followers, as sure as I am I.”

As all this was not more than the fears of Althea had already suggested to her, she did not suffer any new alarm to mislead her from every enquiry that she

she thought might give her light as to what was the best course for her unhappy friend. Wansford had too strongly marked the common traits in his character. He loved money, and hated tricking attorneys; for he had owed to the chicane of one of that description that he had been turned out of his farm. His avarice thus counteracted, the honest feelings of humanity had room for their influence; and though he might have made money by betraying his unfortunate guest to his pursuers, he resisted the temptation, and was eagerly anxious for his safety.

Althea, who had the faculty, uncommon at her age, of reading the sentiments of those with whom she conversed, saw, with satisfaction, that Wansford might be depended upon; she therefore entrusted him, though not without much hesitation and confusion, with her wishes as to affording to Marchmont such pecuniary assistance as might enable

him to quit his present comfortless abode, and convey himself out of the reach of his persecutors.

At the mention of this Althea thought she saw all those half-formed suspicions arise in the mind of Wansford, which she was so unwilling he should harbour. He found it difficult to imagine, that a young lady or any other person would give their money without some particular liking to those on whom it was bestowed. Of that interest which compassion for his singular situation, or mere friendship, could raise in his favour, Wansford was incapable of forming any notion. Whatever were his ideas, he endeavoured carefully to conceal them, and told Althea that he thought he could, by means of Mrs. Mosely, convey to Marchmont whatever she desired, without his knowing from whence it came. She directed him to proceed to do so with the utmost circumspection; and having thus done all that was at present

present possible, she endeavoured to quiet her spirits, and to think of other subjects besides the merits, sufferings, and danger of Marchmont.

But her tranquillity had been too much disturbed, and her imagination too much affected. Secluded so long from all society and every scene of active life, the strange circumstances under which she found herself had doubly the power to affect her, while to the first favourable impression she had received of Marchmont was added all that interest which pity could excite in a generous mind. However earnestly she tried to check such thoughts, she could not help sometimes regretting (what had never given her any concern before) the smallness of her fortune, and reflecting on the happiness it would afford whoever had the power to rescue from his sad destiny a young man of so much merit. To her she knew he never could owe this obligation, yet she felt a comfortless

fenfation when ſhe endeavoured to wiſh that he might receive it from another.— Two days now paſſed, in which ſhe knew nothing but what ſhe gueſſed from the nods and ſhrugs of Wansford, who either could not or would not find an opportunity of converſing with her.— He was abſent twice during that time, and Althea concluded he was ſettling ſomething to effect her preſent purpoſe with Dame Moſely.

In the afternoon, however, of the third day of her ſuſpenſe, ſhe ſaw him under her window, which, on the ſigns he made, ſhe haſtily opened. He gave into her hands a letter.

Althea did not know the hand; but the countenance and manner of the man awakened ſo much apprehenſion, that ſhe had hardly courage to read it.— Caſting her eyes on the ſignature at the bottom, ſhe ſaw the name of Marchmont, and trembled as ſhe ran over the following lines——

“ MADAM,

“MADAM,

“Every hour, since I first dared to intrude myself and my sorrows upon your notice, has increased my respect and admiration, by affording me some new instance of an exalted mind and an excellent heart; but the last proof you have given of your generosity calls upon me for all my gratitude, though I cannot, I dare not accept it.

“Notwithstanding the contrivances of the poor old woman at the cottage, and my friend Wansford, I know the offer I have received of pecuniary assistance could come only from you. I will not enter on the reasons that absolutely forbid my accepting it; Miss Dacres is too candid to impute it to ill-placed pride, when I presume to add, that if she can, in any way not prejudicial to herself, befriend my dear unhappy mother, my young and unprotected sisters, she will find that the

Marchmonts

Marchmonts are not too proud to be grateful.

“ Alas! Madam, those victims to misfortune can never more than now want your pity—for I must leave England. The son, the brother whom they fondly wished to retain in the same country (though he has long been deprived of the power of protecting or supporting them), must yield at last to an inevitable evil, and make his election between imprisonment and exile.

“ I prefer the latter—for Miss Dacres condescended to give her opinion that it was the most advisable. There is no time to hesitate, for the fiend who pursues me is again animated to my destruction. My faithful servant Fenchurch has escaped by something like a miracle from the toils this wretch laid for him, and, as good is sometimes derived from evil, has, in his flight, discovered a means of my getting from hence by sea—and the opportunity is
likely

likely to offer so soon, that I shall quit my *paternal prison* in the middle of the approaching night, and conceal myself in a place on the shore well known to me in happier days; from whence, with the tide at noon, a boat is engaged to carry me on board a vessel bound to Guernsey: from thence I shall cross to France, and endeavour to discover what is become of the Baron de Lavergnac and his family—to whom it is possible I may be useful.

“ I would refrain from expressing, because I am conscious that I ought to do it, the pain I feel at the idea of seeing you no more. I am not so weak and vain as to presume on the kindness you have condescended to shew me. I know I owe it only to the tenderness and humanity of your nature; nor am I capable of forgetting the distance to which fortune has thrown me, from all I might once have aspired to. Perhaps you ought not to forgive me the useless weakness

weakness of owning, that thus to represent sentiments which under other circumstances it would have been the pride and glory of my life to avow, is among the most severe of those trials to which my destiny condemns me.

“ I submit, however—for I have no right to hazard giving a moment’s pain to others; I submit—but will not that generosity I am already so greatly obliged to, pardon me for asking, even, though it cannot perhaps grant, the only favour I will now venture to solicit? ”

“ It is, that before I take a *long*, perhaps a *last* leave of my country, I may see the only friend who is within my reach.—(My mother, my sisters are afar off!)—Is it too presumptuous if I name Miss Dacres as that friend? if I entreat her to allow me to attempt expressing by words all that gratitude I owe her—and to recommend to her the dear unhappy family I leave? Believe me, Madam, I never will intrude upon
you

you again; but it will mitigate the anguish which I feel when I consider *how* I have left them, if I can assure myself that they have so great an alleviation as your humanity can bestow—and if you will deign to see me before I get into the boat which is to carry me from this now inhospitable shore, my poor mother, oppressed with too many sorrows already, will at least know from you that I departed with fortitude; and to *her* you will appear as a guardian angel, whose presence and whose wishes shall secure the safety of her son.

“The information Fenchurch has brought me, as well as what I have received to-day from Wansford, convinces me that I risk much by remaining another night beneath this roof. If I did, I dare not again solicit an interview here, but to-morrow the tide does not allow me to depart from my wild retreat on the shore till about twelve o’clock;—it is little more than a mile and a half
from

from this place. Wansford tells me his eldest girl knows the road.—Ah! Miss Dacres! I am conscious how little right I have to ask such a favour of you; but if your goodness extends so far as to forgive my presumption and indulge my weakness, be assured I shall esteem such an obligation greater than any of those I already owe you. There may be impropriety in your granting me such a request; but if you knew how many reasons combine to make me ask it, how grateful I shall be, and how much such condescension will soften the severity of my destiny—I dare venture to believe you would not refuse it.—Ah! Madam! were it possible to convince you of the veneration, the respect I feel for your virtues, you would not suspect that I would ask what would be derogatory to that gentle dignity, which is one among the thousand graces that surround you. Let me not, however, adopt a style which may offend, even
from

from its sincerity. I know not how to conclude, though conscious I have said too much. Allow me to assure you of the gratitude and esteem with which I must ever be,

“ Madam,

“ Your most devoted servant,

“ EDWARD-ARMYN MARCHMONT.”

The thoughts of Althea were never so confused as after the hasty perusal of this letter. Indeed she read it in such disorder of spirits, that, when she came to the end, she hardly understood what was its purpose; and it was not before a third perusal that she was enabled to consider, with some degree of calmness, whether she ought, or could comply with the request it contained.

It was impossible to mistake the meaning of those half explanatory sentences; or, if they had admitted of any other interpretation, the former conduct of Marchmont left little doubt of his attachment

tachment to her.—On her part she had, from their earliest acquaintance, been conscious of a favourable opinion of him, which, without pretending to combat (because to think well of him was merely justice), she had endeavoured to confine within the bounds of friendship. The objections to any more intimate connection between them were insurmountable; they never appeared otherwise to Althea: and she had been taught so well to regulate her mind; that she was hardly sensible of the preference she gave Marchmont over all the men she had ever seen, before she endeavoured to check the wishes which involuntarily arose, that he had the fortune possessed by this or that fashionable acquaintance of Sir Audley, who neither deserved or knew how to be happy with the great incomes they possessed.

The very effort not to think of him; but as an unfortunate young man of uncommon merit, brought him more frequently

quently to her mind. Then occurred the benevolent hope of being able to promote his interest with her father; and when that hope vanished, she found herself strangely fixed, by her father's orders, in the very spot where the misfortunes of the Marchmont family were continually present to her, and where she met a faithful chronicler of their virtues. The meeting him in this scene, the persecution of which he was the object, the comfortless state he was reduced to, his fortitude and filial tenderness—all combined to complete her predilection, though obstacles to their being ever any other than friends were rather increased than removed.

With all her understanding and command over her reason, Althea was still but a woman; young, and possessed of a degree of sensibility which the attentive friend of her early years had seen with some pain, and invariably endeavoured to correct.

To

To her it appeared as if Marchmont's having thus taken shelter in his paternal house, of which she was by such odd circumstances become an inmate, was an accident that seemed providentially ordered, to engage her friendship, and promote his relief. Though no one could be less disposed to that daring violation of the common rules of society, which sets at defiance the opinion of the world, yet she saw not why she should so far enslave herself to a narrow prejudice, as to deny that friendship to a worthy object, only because he was a young man. She asked herself, why she should refuse to act otherwise in regard to Marchmont than if he was her brother? Her heart accused her of no ill, nor even any imprudent intention; and he had, on his part, explicitly declared he had no hopes of engaging more than her sisterly friendship. This was probably the last time they should ever meet—and she enquired of herself, what

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would

would be her future feelings, if she should hear that this unfortunate young man perished far from his family, without having had an opportunity of speaking to one friend, before his departure, of all that must necessarily lay on his heart in regard to the mother and sisters from whom he was driven? Besides, as he refused the pecuniary assistance which Wansford had awkwardly betrayed to him her intention of offering, she could not be easy without knowing how he had obtained what made that assistance unnecessary. The last question Althea made in this monologue was, how Mrs. Trevyllian would have ordered her to act, could she know of the circumstances she was in?—and recalling to her mind the universal benevolence of her aunt's mind; her disdain of those narrow and gross prejudices which often check the innocent and honest purposes of the heart; and again repeating that Marchmont could never be to her other than

than a brother, the question was finally decided, and she determined to go.

Nothing then remained but for her to contrive the means of letting him know it immediately. For this purpose she sought Wansford; whom luckily meeting alone, as he either was or pretended to be settling his farm accounts, she wrote a short note to Marchmont, which was soon conveyed to him.—Wansford, returning, was about to tell her at what hour his persecuted guest was to depart in the night, and much other intelligence, which Althea certainly desired to have; but as his wife was heard at that moment to come in from the village, all he had time to say was, that his eldest girl should be ordered to shew her in the morning to the head-land, under which was the concealment of Marchmont.—“You had better, Madam,” said he, “tell the child that you can find your way back; and send her away. Indeed, if you come
along

along upon the shore, you will see Malbourne church just upon the brow, a quarter of a mile or so; and if you keep up towards it, you can't miss the path that brings you over the fields on the left, for you presently get a sight of Eastwodeleigh."

Althea, who thought a great deal more of the interview with Marchmont than how she should herself return home from so short a walk, assured Wansford she could easily find her way back, and then left him—trembling at the idea of her having given a promise, yet not wishing to revoke it.

For some hours, sleep absolutely refused to befriend her. The vague intelligence she had received, as well from Marchmont's letter as from the obscure hints of Wansford, impressed her with dread. She imagined that the satellites of the brutal Vampyre lurked round the house, and that, even amidst the darkness of the night, Marchmont would

find it difficult to escape. Full of these fears, she listened to every noise—and imagined more than she heard. A low wind sighed along the passages, and shook at intervals the great old sash frames of her window—then sunk entirely away; and, in the still pause that followed, she fancied there were persons passing slowly and lightly beneath, among the weeds and grass which covered what had once been a great courtyard. Startled at this idea, she left her bed, and went to the window: but the night, though without rain, was dark, and she could not discern even the remains of two lions cut in stone, which (having once been placed over the great gates) were left among other masses of stone-work when the iron was fold, and, from their being white, were distinguishable when darker objects were lost in obscurity. Still a fancied noise tormented her—it might, however, be the footsteps of Marchmont himself and
his

his faithful servant.—“ Ah!” thought she, “ what a comfort it would be to know he was safe! To-morrow I may, perhaps, be satisfied—but how many hours must first pass!”

She now opened the window slowly; but nothing appeared, nor was any sound heard, save the owls, who inhabited, in great numbers, the old barns and ruined offices which were on the other side of the mansion. Attracted by the light in Althea's window, one of them slowly winged its way round the building, and passed very near her.— She shuddered, not from any absolute fear, but from the uneasy sensation that any animal, to which superstition has attached the notion of being *ill-omened*, gives, even to minds the most free from its influence. But Althea, after some reflection, imagining that the sullen whisper of its heavy wings might have been the noise that alarmed her, closed

the window, and once more retired to her bed.

The dawn, however, found her watching its approach with an anxious and uneasy mind. Before the usual hour she went down to her breakfast; Mrs. Wansford, who attended with it, said her husband had gone out very early upon business, and had told her that Nancy was to be ready at eight o'clock to shew Miss Dacres the nearest way to Hascombe-Strand.—Althea found that the good woman, who had not been accustomed to see things otherwise than they were represented to her by those about her, made no remark on this unusual walk; and, again half-doubting whether she ought to go, yet impatient to set out, hastened her little conductress, and began her expedition.

She now found herself at a greater distance from Eastwoodleigh than she had ever been on the side next the sea,
and

and on the other side the cottage had hitherto limited her walks. The way was through lanes bounded by elms, which, though not yet in full leaf, were so closely interwoven in the bank with a luxurious growth of holly, that nothing was to be seen beyond them—till on a sudden the road, ascending a steep hollow way, opened to a kind of common field, forming the top of a high promontory, commanding an immense extent of sea, and, for many miles, the indented cliffs of the western coast.—Such was its elevation, that Althea had no notion how it was possible to descend to the water. With anxious eyes she surveyed the expanse of ocean; it was indeed a “shipless sea,” neither boat nor any larger vessel was to be seen, and she feared the people Marchmont had expected might have disappointed him.

The child now shewed her a narrow and rugged descent, made by cutting

the red clay and stones, of which the cliffs are here composed, into a sort of rude steps. Here Althea dismissed her guide, bidding her return immediately home; and then, with less fear than she might at another time have felt, descended to the margin of the sea.

On reaching it, she found herself under an almost mural range of rocks, composed of dark earth, and broad strata of reddish-coloured stones, horizontally arranged, as if by the hands of man. The place where she had descended seemed the only practicable part; for a little farther on the height became tremendous, and the face of the rock perpendicular towards the top, while beneath it was eaten by the water into deep caverns: from one of these she expected to see Marchmont appear—but, for some time, she looked around her in vain.

Vast masses, fallen from the cliffs, were scattered between them and the water at the tide of ebb. With the tide
of

of flood, these pieces, worn into grotesque and giant shapes, were half-covered by the waves. Already the rising water broke rippling round the most remote craggs—to their rude surface, clams, limpets, and muscles adhered, among the sea-weed that grew streaming about them. All was wild, solitary, and gloomy; the low murmur of the water formed a sort of accompaniment to the cries of the sand-piper, the *puffin-awk*; while the screaming gull, and the hoarse and heavy cormorant, were heard, at intervals, still louder. Althea, as she sat on a fragment of stone, surveying the scene and listening to these noises, could have fancied herself thrown by shipwreck on some desert coast, where she was left to solitude and despair.

The tide rose slowly in so calm a morning, yet it was now so high, that it seemed certain the hour could not be far off when Marchmont ex-

pected the boat. Again she feared some disappointment, some accident; and, quitting her rugged seat, went on towards a part where the view along the sands was less impeded by broken rocks. Two persons soon after appeared, one of whom she knew to be Marchmont. As soon as he perceived Althea, he sprang forward to meet her; while the other person, who was, she thought, his servant, retired out of sight.

CHAP. IX.

Ecco quel siero istante!

IN approaching Althea, the various emotions that agitated the mind of Marchmont were visible on his countenance and manner.—“How very good you are, Miss Dacres, thus to honour me!” said he—“But I must not attempt to express my gratitude; indeed to do so is out of my power:—I am afraid I have made you wait?—I ought to account for such an additional intrusion on your time and humanity—but the boat which is to take me from hence, perhaps for ever, will

very soon be here: I have directed it to wait for me behind those projecting rocks."

His hesitation, the confused and uneasy manner in which he uttered these abrupt sentences, and the anguish so unequivocally marked on his countenance, deeply affected Althea. She trembled, and knew not what to reply. Afraid of expressing all she felt, yet equally afraid of appearing cold and repulsive by her silence, she meditated how to avoid either; but Marchmont, after pausing a moment, proceeded:

"I solicited this honour, Madam, that, in taking my last adieu of my native country, I might—Pardon me!—I hardly know what I would say! My fate, however severe it has appeared to me, never till *now* was so insupportable! It is no time for dissimulation; yet I am but too sensible, that when I dissimulate no longer, I risk the forfeiture of the last hope I have on earth. Can you,
ought

ought you to forgive the presumption of a man, who dares to avow his admiration, his love? knowing that he *ought not* to expect any return—and that his hazarding to speak, may deservedly subject him to the loss of that generous friendship with which you have honoured him?”

All the courage that Althea had been collecting was insufficient to enable her to articulate an answer.—It was now to be decided, whether she should for ever relinquish an affection which she had insensibly cherished for so many months, and to the indulgence of which nothing could be opposed but mere worldly prudence, or avow those sentiments that were the natural effects of uncommon merit on an ingenuous and generous mind—sentiments which, however she might endeavour to conceal them, were too deeply impressed ever to be effaced. Marchmont was indeed poor—a fugitive, and an exile; but, was he there-

fore less estimable?—The causes of his poverty and distress rendered him infinitely more respectable—and was it for *her* to drive him from her, merely because he possessed not those pecuniary advantages which she contemned? Could she bid him go with an impression that her heart was mercenary and narrow?—Could she say, “ You are unworthy of my regard, because you are poor: your merit, your birth are nothing, for *I* know no real advantages but money?” It was true, that to encourage his passion would be imprudent in the opinion of the world; but, had not her father taught her to renounce the world—while, in sending her from it, and banishing her his house, he had left her without any connection to attach her, any duty to fulfil? All these thoughts passed with rapidity through her mind—they were less overwhelming, because many of them had been canvassed before; but far from yet
having

having the power to express even that part of her sentiments which she had determined not to disguise, she awaited with a palpitating heart for the conclusion of what Marchmont had to say, who, apparently encouraged by her manner, after a short pause, went on——

“ I know, loveliest Miss Dacres, all the circumstances of your situation—I know that to avoid a detested marriage you submitted to the melancholy seclusion of Eastwodeleigh—and I am well aware, that Fortune has been as niggardly of her favours to you, as Nature has been bountiful. God forbid that I should ask you to share such a destiny as *mine*!—I have already felt too severely, in the persons of those I most love, all the humiliations and inconveniences of indigence, to entertain such a thought as that of *your* becoming a party. If the definition of true love be, that it prefers the real good of its object to every other consideration, I dare assert

assert that I feel its most powerful influence.—Yet, may I not hope to be spared the cruel necessity of relinquishing all prospect of hearing from you?—of being accounted, whatever may be my destiny, among the number of your friends? I will not, however, affect to say, that I never mean to ask more than your friendship. Whatever may hitherto have been my disappointments, a man of my age ought not to despair—happier fortune may yet give him hopes of aspiring to your favour. But I most solemnly assure you, I will never intrude upon your pity till those better prospects shall open to me; and if, before that time arrives, some enviable man, in a situation more worthy of you, should be deemed deserving your favour, the unfortunate Marchmont shall never be heard to interrupt your felicity with his complaints.”

Althea now took courage to say, in a low voice—“Alas! Sir, to what can
our

our correspondence tend, but to render us both unhappy?"

"If it will have that effect on *you*," cried Marchmont, eagerly interrupting her, "I renounce my hopes: but for me—Ah! I have, till this moment, had the presumption to flatter myself Yes! I *did* believe that the generosity of which I have had so many proofs would have been extended to this last instance of pity and regard. It will soften to me the horrors of that cruel exile which is the only alternative to a prison;—it will give me courage to endure a life that I have been sometimes half-tempted to escape from. To you, dearest Miss Dacres, how can it be injurious?—If the unfortunate object of your compassion is indifferent to you, *your* peace cannot be disturbed by this act of humanity—If he be not but I dare not hope it."

Althea, in increased distress, knew not what to say: to refuse seemed inhuman—

man—to consent, imprudent.—Marchmont saw she hesitated.—He pursued his argument with all the ardour lent him by the hope of success. He represented that, whenever she found any inconvenience from the receipt of his letters, she might deprive him of the happiness of corresponding with her—that she was accountable to nobody, since Sir Audley gave himself no trouble to direct her.—He then went on to say——

“ Of the person, Madam, who presumes to solicit such a favour of you, it is fit you should know what has been the course of his days. Allow me, since I may never again, or not for a very long time, enjoy the happiness I am now admitted to—allow me to relate the short history of my life since I have been a wanderer in the world. To a mind like that which you possess, I am persuaded that to have endured adversity with some degree of resolution will not appear

appear less meritorious, than not to have abused prosperity."

Althea, whose agitation this prelude was calculated to increase, did not trust her voice with an answer; but she seemed willing to give her attention to what he proposed relating—and Marchmont thus proceeded:

"I believe you have heard from my friend Eversley, and perhaps since from the poor old servant, the former circumstances of a family less fortunate than known. I will not dwell on the consequence and fortune it once possessed; for *some* experience and many mortifications have done away what I was once taught to cherish—pride, on account of *the days that are gone*.—The most painful part of a life, of which none has yet been very fortunate, was *that* when I saw my father vainly struggling with the pressure of adversity; and, towards the close of his life, sacrificing his own ease and quiet, which he might
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in a great measure have possessed, in the hope of preserving for *me* the remaining part of my patrimony, and that great house of which you are now an inhabitant. I saw the hopelessness of the attempt—I knew, that if to save the ruins of our fortune had been possible, they could never have enabled me to live at Eastwoodleigh. But my poor father heard all my remarks on this subject, whenever he suffered it to be discussed, with something like resentment at my want of what *he* thought proper and laudable ambition; and it became a point of duty, that I should remain a silent though wretched spectator of the Sisyphæan labour to which his tenderness for me condemned him.—It was under a sort of dissimulation of my real purpose that I obtained permission of him to go, about two years since, to France. When I was there, I thought that a favourable prospect opened for my entering into business at Bourdeaux; but

but two things were necessary—my father's consent, and some money—neither of which I had much hope of procuring. However the change of ideas, which was then rapidly making progress in France, helped greatly to facilitate my scheme. The Baron de Lavergnac, notwithstanding the principles of his family and the habits of his life, was reasonable enough to listen to my arguments; and he not only offered me his purse and his credit, but undertook to conquer the prejudices of my father. He in a great degree succeeded; I was received into an eminent mercantile house at Bourdeaux. You know how the Revolution in France, which at its beginning wore, I thought, a more auspicious appearance, has overturned in its progress the prosperity of trade, which it affected to enlarge and to protect: the house, into which I had been received as one of the younger partners, and whose commercial interest I thought myself

myself likely to promote by my English connections, was one of the first that was swept away in the increasing tempest.—I returned to England, without any other advantage than that of having acquired such an additional knowledge of a language I was before a tolerable proficient in, that I might perhaps pass as well for a native of France as of England.”

“Alas! I came back, disappointed myself, to witness the more bitter disappointments of my poor father—who, during my absence, had been making new efforts, every one of which was eventually injurious not only to his temporary tranquillity, but to the wreck of that property he was so solicitous to keep together. It would only be giving you pain, Miss Dacres, were I to relate all that I then went through. I now reflect on it with sensations so uneasy, that I am glad to avert my thoughts from every recollection, but the only one that gives

gives me any comfort—that every moment of my time was given to smooth for my unhappy parent the downward path of life.—Ah! Miss Dacres, he was driven prematurely thither by distress of mind! by the cruelty of”

Althea shuddered:—the idea that Sir Audley had by his severity contributed to the sad close of the life of this unhappy father, was more than she could calmly bear. Marchmont saw her emotion—and instantly guessing the cause, repented of what he had said, and hastened to relate other circumstances that might carry her mind from it.

“ I lost this venerated and lamented parent—with what anguish of heart I need not say. It was necessary, however, to check my own feelings, or at least to conceal them, that I might not increase the sad sufferings of my mother, who, ill as she thought of the situation of her family, knew not the extent of the evil; my father having
always

always concealed the worst from her, with impolitic affection—which was, however, at least an amiable weakness. He could not bear to see her unhappy; and my mother, in the same view of saving *him* from pain, concealed how far her knowledge of the truth went, or how much she was affected by what she knew.

“ It was upon the same principle of concealing, what it would quite have killed her to have known, that I hastily agreed to any proposition made me by the villain Vampyre, to save even a moment’s delay, lest the inhuman step he took in stopping the remains of my father on the day of his burial should be known to her. I have since heard that all he did then was entirely illegal. But I was ignorant myself of all the chicanery of the law; I had no friend near me whom I could at that moment consult, for Everfley dared not appear, or assist me, on account of his wife; and
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when a certain time had passed after these illegal acts, I found all my attempts at redress set aside by certain rules and forms, of which I understand no more than I do of the causes, why the best of all possible laws are often abused, to the very worst of all possible purposes.

“ In this case, as indeed too often happens, my intentions were wholly counteracted, and that which was done to save my mother from one distress, brought upon her another—another, which has never ceased to press upon her since—for from the engagement I was then compelled to enter into I have never since been able to disengage myself.—It has driven me first into concealment, and now into exile.”

A pause, that seemed to be the effect of the bitter recollections which arose in his mind, now gave an opportunity for Althea to say,

“ But your friend Eversley?—Could
not

not he have come forward in so trying a moment?—Ought he not?”

“ Ah! Miss Dacres, my friend Everfley had already done but too much for me. The friendly assistance he had afforded my father had almost exhausted the resources that were peculiarly his own, and I knew had embroiled him with that vulgar and violent woman his wife—who, having been unable during their marriage to find any other cause of reproach, had fixed upon his generosity to *my* family as an unfailing subject of remonstrance and rage. To such misery on my account I could not determine to expose a man so sincerely my friend, and to whom I already owed so many obligations.—Yet such was his kindness, that, when I absolutely refused to suffer his pecuniary interference to an amount so considerable as would have released me from the inveterate malice of Vampyre, he employed the
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sum he had prepared for that purpose, or at least all he could raise, in repurchasing for my mother an annuity of eighty pounds a year, hers and my sister's sole dependance, which in the last days of my father's life she had sold, as the only means that offered to prevent those sad days from being embittered by the intrusion of bailiffs and attorneys into the very chamber where he lay dying!"

Again the voice of Marchmont failed him, but in a moment he conquered his emotion, and went on—

“On the noble humanity of such a friend, I determined, whatever I might suffer, no farther to trespass. Could I indeed have got over my reluctance to accept, what I knew cost him all the domestic tranquillity which he had made so many sacrifices to preserve; I could never have consented to exhaust for my own convenience that friendly assistance, which might hereafter be ne-

cessary to those whose ease was infinitely dearer to me than my own. I was young, and active; my spirit was yet unbroken by personal disappointment, for I had hardly on my own account entered the world. I am naturally of a sanguine temper; and though I had already been enough initiated into the school of adversity, to have discovered that there were villains among mankind, such as in the happy simplicity of early youth I had not supposed could exist; yet, I rather believed we had been particularly unfortunate in the persons with whom we had had dealings, than that *many* such were to be found in the great mass of society.

“ With these impressions, and with perhaps a presumptuous reliance on my own powers, I courageously began a career, in which, though I knew many others had failed, I for a while believed I might succeed, and by dint of my own efforts rescue my family from pecuniary

cuniary distress, and myself from the wretchedness of dependence. You will smile, perhaps, if I tell you that I was so new to the world in which I was to struggle, and so confident of the buoyant powers of my own mind, that I believed these important purposes might be effected by authorship. You have undoubtedly read the life of the unhappy Chatterton, which, with that of many other luckless projectors in the same visionary pursuit, ought to have served as a warning against these presumptuous and airy hopes. But, though conscious that I had less genius, I thought I could guard against many of the errors young authors have fallen into; and I even flattered myself that the friends of my family, who would not come forward before, would promote my interest when they saw my exertion; while others, I supposed, would esteem me for the motive by which that exertion was induced. In these speculations I was not wholly

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disappointed. Some who had interest in the world of fashion were not unwilling to *chaperon* my first appearance; but among these were not to be reckoned any of my own family—for, if any thing could have roused the avaricious apathy of Lady Silchester, and some of the rest of my mother's relations, to give me either their interest with government, or their pecuniary help, it would have been their dislike to having an author among their relatives. However, as they loved money better than even the indulgence of this ridiculous pride, they first endeavoured to divert me from my purpose by promising, if I would turn my attention to another line, that they would try to get me some small place. I had heard, and been thoroughly convinced, of the futility of such promises before: I refused, therefore, to lose a moment in listening to them. They affected anger at my doubts of their executing what they promised, and against the shame of being related to
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an author, found a ready resource in wholly neglecting him. Indeed, from the hour when the fortunes of my father began evidently to decline, the relations of my mother, who never had shewn her much attention, began to withdraw from any connection with her or her children; and till I was once more forced upon the notice of Lady Silchester by one of her acquaintance, she had affected to lose sight of us for some years. What *she* did not do, the rest of the family who were one degree farther removed, thought themselves happily exempted from undertaking. I found others, however, who had, as I believed, more power to forward my views in the line I had adopted. I was considered as a young man of great promise by some of those persons zealous for literature and the arts, who love to have their names often appear as protectors of infant genius; but, to the advantage I was to derive from their countenance,

I found some conditions annexed not very consistent with the spirit of independence which I had determined to preserve — for it was necessary, if I would avail myself of literary patronage, to sacrifice my own opinion to the judgement and experience of these my protectors; which I was not always modest and diffident enough to do without reluctance, and it happened unfortunately that no two of them thought alike. — However, as an experiment how far using their sagacity was preferable to trusting to my own inexperience, I consented to follow the advice of him who seemed to me the best judge of literary business, and he undertook to shew me how I might lengthen a trifling *jeu d'esprit* that had met with some applause, into a long poem. It cost me a good deal of labour; but when it was published, instead of the profits on which I had calculated, I found myself considerably indebted to the printer and publisher;

publisher; and was told, what I was soon convinced was true, that nobody now ever thinks of reading a poem of above twenty lines—that poetry is quite out of fashion—and that the shelves in the booksellers' warehouses are loaded with poetry unread and unknown: that there has not been above one successful poem for the last ten years; and that a party only agreeing to praise his works, or some unaccountable caprice of fashion, gives a poet the least chance of popularity, even if he is lucky enough to escape the blight of criticism, which often withers his poetical laurels before they are even unfolded.

“My good Sir,” said the person, who from experience gave me all this information, “my good Sir, this is not a poetical age.—I assure you, that, whatever may be your talents, nothing can be done in that way, and I verily believe the very best poems will not pay for the printing. If you have no turn for po-

litics, which indeed is a line now almost over-occupied, turn your thoughts to novel writing—narrative, let it be about what it will, is read, because the mind quietly acquiesces, and it requires no trouble to think about it. On your part it will demand much less care in the composition. Never mind improbabilities—put together a sufficient number of facts—the more unlikely the better. If you are too idle to choose the trouble of inventing, collect eight or nine of the most popular works of that sort; take a piece of one, and a piece of another, and put them together, only a little altered, just to disguise them: never mind whether what the painters call *keeping*, can in this motley assemblage be attended to; nobody thinks about that: sprinkle the whole plentifully with horrors of some sort or other, to stimulate the languid attention, and you will have a certainty of a sale at least among the circulating libraries, which, after all, is the principal

principal sale that can be expected; for who buy novels?—Who indeed buy books at all in these times? unless it be men of science who cannot do without them. However, if you can produce any thing tolerably new in this line, you will do pretty well, and you will find bookfellers who will deal with you.”

“The prospect thus offered me,” continued Marchmont, “was not very flattering; but I had very little choice, and I set about what is sometimes called an epic in prose, and acknowledged to be, when well managed, a considerable effort of the human mind; and sometimes stigmatised as a species of work calculated only to enervate the mind, and inflame with false representations the imagination of youth. I went on (as I believed myself) pretty well at first; but when my hero was fairly launched into the history, I found myself surrounded with difficulties, and in danger, as every page proceeded, of going against

some of those rocks which my instructor had taught me to beware of. Without incident nothing was to be done, but almost every possible event was already in print; and notwithstanding what my advisers had said, I was too proud to borrow. Improbable and forced adventures, events that never yet happened on the habitable globe, and never could happen by any chance short of an absolute miracle, disgusted me; and prosing conversations, or circumstances but little elevated above the daily occurrences of life, would, I thought, disgust my readers. As to characters, I had not yet seen enough of the world to *imagine* them, from the faint sketches I had made; and I found that, if I represented such as had come within my observation, I should be accused of personality. If I made my hero an unfortunate wanderer, existing by his own efforts, I understood that I should be accused of egotism, and of having represented my own adventures. If I made

made him too long or too suddenly prosperous, nobody would care about him at all. If he were painted with too many perfections, he would be called a poor imitation of Sir Charles Grandison—a faultless monster: but if I gave him a proportion of those errors to which high-spirited youth is particularly liable, I should then be accused of having pictured an agreeable libertine, whose example, like those of Ranger, Charles Surface, or Tom Jones, could not fail of being pernicious.

“ Nor was the landscape of my piece less difficult to decide upon than the figures. If my scene lay in other countries, I must give to my characters the manners of those countries, which of course rendered them less interesting to the bulk of my intended readers in this: I might indeed have carried my story to the reigns of our Edwards and Henries—but besides that this species of writing was already successfully occupied, I

could not represent modern manners as existing in the persons of our ancestors in their heavy armour, and fierce prowess; or in their softer moments, in satin doublets and flashed sleeves. I found too the preservation of the unities a work of some difficulty. I was told, and indeed I saw from several examples, that neither time nor place was much minded, and that I might hazard being equally careless of chronology and geography; but I piqued myself on having studied Aristotle, and scrupulously attended to the probabilities of time and place. I turned my eyes to the scenes that were passing almost before them, and thought, by relating without much addition from fiction some of the many events that were passing in private life in a neighbouring country, that I might unite interest with truth: I was soon, however, turned aside from this experiment, by hearing that novel-writing has in one respect an affinity to the drama—
that

that time and distance are required to soften for use the harsher features that may be exhibited from real life; that it was almost impossible to bring forward *events* without touching on their *causes*; and that any tendency to political discussion, however liberal or applicable, was not to be tolerated in a sort of work which people took up with no other design than to be amused at the least possible expence of thought. In this case I was to be like the courtly preacher, who deemed it altogether shocking to

“ —mention *Hell* to ears polite.”

“ Thus, in a choice of difficulties, I laboured on—with what success, it now matters not. At some other opportunity (if indeed I dare indulge the hope that, at some future time, I may be allowed the happiness I now enjoy) I may trouble you, Madam, with the history of my progress with *the encouragers of literature*, among whom indeed I found

found it to be true, that the fraternity of Booksellers are, for the most part, to be relied on, and with *them* at least I so successfully made my way, that I was enabled to assist my family (though by no means to the extent of my wishes), and to supply myself. I believe indeed I should have done better in time (as on my *soi-disant* friends of every description I ceased to depend), but to carry on this business in obscurity was impossible. No sooner was my name known as being in some degree a successful candidate for literary emolument, than my address was procured by Vampyre from my publisher, and I became more than ever the object of that monster's persecution. He himself ventured, sheltered as he believed by the armour of his profession, to present his own hideous libel on the human form in my lodgings—attended, as he almost always is, by a miserable sneaking being of a clerk.— I listened for two or three minutes to
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his insolence—and then, though I think I am not of a very choleric temper, found myself seized with an impulse to kick him down stairs, so irresistible, that I immediately shewed him that manner of descending with great velocity, and then handed his clerk after him into the street—where the mob, who in a second of time gather in a populous thoroughfare, hearing, from the people where I lodged, that the reptile they saw so suddenly spring out of the door into the middle of the coach-way was a villainous attorney who had ruined a family, determined to add an epilogue to my figure-dance, by no means to the taste of Mr. Solicitor Vampyre; whose zeal for his clients might well have been cooled by the discipline he received under the next pump, had it not been re-animated by resentment for this personal disgrace. He now had added a fresh cause of vengeance to his native diabolical malignity, and to his desire
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to find new excuses for getting money from his stupid and wicked employers.— From that time he redoubled his persecution, and I was compelled either to submit to imprisonment, or to fly.— Though this scourge to individuals, and disgrace to the species in general, often practises and resides in *the neighbourhood of a great sea-port* not far from the place where we now are, it was here—that—on account of Mrs. Mofely . . . (Marchmont hesitated, and seemed to be confused) and for other considerations, I determined to conceal myself. Of the sequel I believe it is unnecessary to speak.”

Althea, though her countenance bore evidence how much this narrative had affected her, did not immediately find words that answered to her meaning.— Marchmont availed himself of her silence again to plead for permission to write to her: and his eloquence was perhaps aided by the circumstance of the moment;

ment; for a signal was suddenly given from behind some high rocks to the left of that where they sat, and the boat, with Fenchurch and two seamen in it, immediately appeared from beyond a promontory. Marchmont, unwilling to expose Althea to the gaze of these men, now tore himself away, having at length obtained the permission he so ardently solicited—and, hurrying from her, made a signal to Fenchurch to bring the boat on shore farther on, where high cliffs ran out into the sea, and shut out all near view of the spot where he was now compelled to take a reluctant leave of Althea.

When he was gone, she sat down breathless, and with a beating heart, on her former seat; hardly daring to recollect what had passed, or to enter on any self-enquiry as to the propriety of her conduct. With eyes fixed on the sea, she waited in an undescrivable state of mind for the sight of the boat, and fancied

fancied that, amidst the low and almost imperceptible murmurs of the tide, she heard the dashing oars. Nor was she deceived; in a few moments she saw it slowly appear beyond the promontory. Marchmont was standing in it, his looks apparently fixed on the place where he had left her—but the distance was soon too great to allow her to distinguish his features. She saw, however, that he stretched his arms towards her, then clasped his hands together as if offering a prayer to heaven for her safety. The dull haze that had been long gathering over the sea, now thickened so much, that the boat, and the passengers in it, became indistinct; appearing only like a dark shapeless spot amidst the wide expanse of water; and it was soon afterwards hardly to be seen at all. While Althea could trace, or fancy she could trace it through the mist and intervening distance, she remained on the shore, then reluctantly and slowly returned by
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the rugged steps to the summit of the cliff; and from thence again surveyed the sea, now undistinguishable from the sky, all being alike overclouded. She thought, however, that she still saw the boat move through the distant waves — till the head-land which forms one side of Torbay* seemed to intervene. It was there, as Marchmont had informed her, the vessel lay that was to receive him.—The heart of Althea, recently awakened to new sensations by the certainty that Marchmont loved her, now sunk in sick and languid despondence; for she reflected that it was more than possible she had lost sight of him for ever.

Hardly distinguishing her way, she now looked around her to be certain that she was in the right road back to the house of Eastwoodleigh, which, large as it was, could not be distinguished

* Berry Head.

even from this high ground; because of the numerous tall elms every where lining the lanes of this country, which in many places appeared like a continual wood. Fortunately she had remarked a singular bank of red-coloured earth in her way, which now served her as a guide to the steep lane she had ascended; and afterwards her road lay entirely along it, till she came to the ivy-clad ruins of one of the lodges of the disparked environs of Eastwoodleigh.

When Althea entered the house, she hastened immediately to her own room, fancying, as she passed Wansford and his wife, that they both looked at her as if they knew she returned from meeting Marchmont—so much power has the imagination when the conscience is not calm. In fact, it was in the present case merely conscience that raised this idea; for, though Wansford knew it, he carefully avoided looking at her as she
came

came in—and his wife had no certain knowledge that Marchmont had ever been in the house, and was free from every suspicion that related to Althea.

To a young and ingenuous mind there is nothing so painful as the first idea of having committed an error.—Althea, who had always accustomed herself to enquire whether what she did was perfectly consonant to the maxims she had received from Mrs. Trevyllian, thus establishing a sort of second conscience as her guide, now trembled to make this appeal. Yet, when once it was made, many reflections arose which helped to reconcile her to herself. Though she had died unmarried, Mrs. Trevyllian had none of that prudish reserve which often degenerates into ridiculous austerity at a late period of life. She had not indeed taught Althea, that the first purpose of her life was to attract a man of fortune for a husband, but had rather endeavoured

endeavoured to give her such principles as would make her pass a single life in cheerful content, if such (as was very probable) should be her lot, notwithstanding her personal advantages, and the sweetness of her manners; for Mrs. Trevyllian knew, that to considerations merely interested she never would sacrifice herself; while it was very doubtful whether such a man as united the advantages of fortune to those of a cultivated mind, would ever fall in her way. From this manner of thinking during the course of her education, Althea had acquired an ingenuous simplicity of character. She had no design on the hearts of the men she conversed with, and was therefore always easy and unaffected, without familiarity or flippancy. But she had never been taught to believe, that it was right to fly from or avoid any man because he was indigent; and she knew that Mrs. Trevyllian herself had

had been much attached to a gentleman of very small fortune, whose death alone prevented their marriage. Though unacquainted with the particular circumstances which had thrown a shade of melancholy over the life of her aunt (for she had never courage to speak of them), Althea was assured, from this instance, that, had her aunt been living, she would not have condemned her partiality to Marchmont, though she might have thought marriage very imprudent under the present circumstances of both their fortunes. Nor could Althea help reflecting, that the observation Marchmont made was but too just, when he said that she was accountable to nobody; for her father seemed entirely to abandon her, and she had no other relations who had either inclination or right to direct her. Her situation, therefore, was altogether different from that of a young woman directly under the protection of a parent,

rent, or of immediate friends. She broke through no duty; and the tender compassion and personal preference with which she thought of Marchmont, and which had induced her to consent to correspond with him, interfered with none of those principles of conduct which her propriety of mind would never have allowed her to violate.

Having thus reconciled herself to the past, she ventured to look forward to the future; but her courage and hope failed when she thought of the situation in which her unhappy lover had left his native country to go he hardly knew whither, but probably to another where danger and distress were likely to meet him. He had evaded all explanation on money matters: but there was every reason to suppose he was but slenderly supplied with the means of existence; and it appeared very uncertain, whether on his reaching France it would

would be possible to make his way across the whole kingdom to the southern coast, where, not far from Toulon, his relation the Baron de Lavergnac resided. If he did reach that side of France, from all present intelligence there was too much cause to apprehend that Monsieur de Lavergnac was involved in the general ruin that menaced the royal party, to which he decidedly belonged.

With all these apprehensions continually present to her, Althea now tasted no more peace than when she knew Marchmont to be within a hundred paces of her, and to be in momentary danger of being dragged away to end his life in a prison.

Yet distant and uncertain dangers appeared less hideous than the persecution of the *fiend* Vampyre; and when she remembered that another day might have put Marchmont into his hands, the assurance of his escape seemed a gratify-

ing reflection, and the gloomy uncertainty of what was to come appeared less terrible.

A long interval was yet to pass before any intelligence of the poor wanderer could arrive; and Althea was conscious how tedious and forlorn her desolate solitude would appear. Though she had never been accustomed to confidantes of her own age (for Mrs. Trevyllian had always disliked that girlish caballing which frequently corrupts the minds of young people), she now felt the want of some one to whom she could speak of Marchmont without restraint. Her thoughts again turned towards his mother and his sisters. To them alone could she hazard naming him. But they were far from her; and as Marchmont had assured her that his mother intended, as soon as he was in a place of greater safety, to acknowledge all the kindnesses that Althea had intended, or that Marchmont

mont had received; she was compelled to wait for this overture from Mrs. Marchmont, before she could venture to express the ardent desire she felt to love and serve her.

CHAP. X.

“ Ah! do not think thou art alone unhappy!”

THE day after the departure of Marchmont, the calm stillness of the morning tempted Althea to revisit the shore, which was in some measure a new object to her, and would now, she thought, afford her a melancholy pleasure. From thence she proposed walking to the cottage of Mrs. Mosely, with whom she wished to converse; and having procured such a direction from Wansford as was likely to be a sufficient guide, she set forth about one o'clock, intending to take a cold dinner at her return.

The

The same spot, where for perhaps the last time Althea had seen the only man she had ever thought of with approbation, and who might be called indeed almost the only person in the world who felt an interest in her fate; or for whom she was herself interested, could hardly fail of inspiring her with mournful reflections: but with them a degree of pleasure mingled itself; and the sort of day was well calculated to encourage the melancholy yet soothing reverie she fell into.

As on the day preceding, a gauzy mist hovered over the unruffled sea, spreading from thence to the land, and softening every object of the rich coast on either side.

The quiet solemnity of the hour and scene was not broken by the gay and lively verdure of May; for the distant landscape was softened by the hazy vapour; yet, as she wandered slowly

along the broad margin of sand, which she had been told led to an easier acclivity of the cliff, from whence her walk to the cottage might be considerably shortened, she remarked some of those plants, inhabitants of the borders of the sea, of which her aunt had taught her the names on a former visit to the coast.

The * sea reed grass, covering many of the broad beds of sand, waved its yet feeble spires in the hardly perceptible breeze; within the immediate spray of the waves the sea † holly put forth its gray and thorny leaves; and where the more undisturbed surface of the sands allowed them to be clothed with a slight covering of turf, the small yellow stars of the ‡ ladies' bed-straw were just opening among it.—The fairy nose-

* *Arundo Arenaria.* † *Eryngium Maritimum.*

‡ *Galium Verum.*

gays,

gays, which with this and the beautiful convolvulus*, peculiar to the western coast, a native also of the arid beach, she used to delight in making, while walking with her dear protectress, came to her remembrance, and, softened as her mind was before, filled her eyes with tears.

But the recollection of Mrs. Trevilian was always salutary. In recalling those simple pleasures, the admirable lessons with which every enjoyment was accompanied recurred to her. Among these, fortitude was a virtue on which her aunt had constantly dwelt with peculiar energy; as if she had foreseen how much occasion her beloved Althea would one day have to exert it. Instead, therefore, of allowing herself to dwell on ideas which served only to depress and enervate her mind, she turned

* *Convolvulus Soldanella.*

it towards the means of fulfilling the parting wishes of Marchmont, who had entreated her to allow his mother and his sisters to be known to her, and to transfer to them all that active benevolence of friendship of which he could not avail himself. The poor old servant at the cottage, too, he had warmly recommended to her humanity; and aroused by these recollections she shook off that pleasing but useless pensiveness which was stealing upon her, and quickened her pace towards the cabin of Mrs. Mosely, which she found with less difficulty than she expected; for, though concealed by the rude inequalities of a common, which was at the western extremity of the grounds of Eastwodeleigh, it was hardly a mile from the sea. She found the solitary tenant of this lone cottage full of trouble. Whatever terrors she had undergone for "*her dear child, her dear young master,*" as she called Marchmont, while for the course of several

several months he had been hunted by the blood-hounds of the law, they were now forgotten in the cruel idea, that he was "*gone beyond sea*;" which amounted, in the opinion of Mrs. Mosely, to a certainty that she should see him no more.

Wild and vague ideas of scenes passing in France, horrible enough, and rendered more strangely hideous by her long-rooted prejudices, had taken possession of Mrs. Mosely's mind—but still the predominant impression was, the danger of "*going beyond sea*."

Althea for a moment attempted to stifle all she felt herself, to combat impressions so painful to a mind already enfeebled by time and calamity; and though to all that she could say the poor old woman gave no other answer than a deep sigh, and a motion with her head that expressed hopeless incredulity as to the safety of her "*dear master*," Althea began to flatter herself that she
should

should reason her into more tranquillity, when a quick step was heard near the cottage door.

Althea started without knowing why; and Mrs. Mosely, accustomed to be always on the watch since Marchmont's personal safety had been in question, moved to the door as quickly as her infirmities permitted, and, looking out, returned to her seat, saying it was only poor Phœbe.

“And who is poor Phœbe?” enquired Althea.

“Poor unhappy girl!” replied Mrs. Mosely, “she is a godchild, Madam, of mine; and never any body met with greater misfortunes for her station. Her poor brain is hurt by all she has gone through; but she is very harmless, and sometimes her senses return again for a time. I am afraid, poor creature! she is in one of her wandering fits now—for she seldom comes at other times. Indeed,

deed, I have not seen her before these two months."

Althea had no time to enquire farther as to the object that had already excited her pity, when a young woman of one or two and twenty, pale and thin, her dress clean but coarse, and without a hat, entered the room with a hurried step; and not seeming to observe that Althea was there, she came up to the old woman, and, taking her hand, smiled—but it was a melancholy smile—then looking steadily in her face, said,

"I have got to you at last, my dear friend! They would have hindered me again: but I have stole away from them, and you will let me stay with you, will you not?"

"Yes, Phœbe," said Dame Mosely, "if you will stay in the house, and not leave me without telling where you are going to. But there is the young lady that used to send me so much help when you was here last."

"The

"The young lady!" cried the unhappy girl, "I am in the way then—I am sorry I came. Pray forgive me; I did not know the lady was here. Pray be not angry—I will go home again—indeed I will."

"No, no," interrupted Althea, "you shall stay here, Phœbe. I am myself going presently; and till I do, it will distress me if you do not sit down and talk to your old friend just as you used to do."

Phœbe looked at her with an unsteady yet expressive eye; then, turning to Mrs. Mosely, she said in a half whisper,

"She is like the angels I used to dream of once, when I had hopes of going among them away from this bad world; and I thought they had just such voices."

"That lady is as much of an angel as ever was in this world," replied Mrs. Mosely aloud.

Phœbe

Phœbe answered only by a deep sigh.

Dame Mosely again spoke to her. She heeded her not, but, fixing her eyes on the window, sighed again as if her heart would break. Then, after a moment's pause, she turned quickly, and said,

"You remember! So now, as you are busy, dear godmother, I will go."

"Not down to the sea-side," answered the other.

"Why! I have not been there a long, long time, till to-day, indeed! and I am better, a great deal better for it."

"Well, well, Phœbe, you must not go again—you must not, indeed. Come, if you do not mind me I shall be angry, and will not let you come to see me again."

"Won't you?—Oh! that will be very cruel. And will you, my oldest and last friend, be as cruel as all other people are? Well, if you will, *do* then! make me be shut up again, and make me to be
beat

beat and punished by that cruel” (another deep sigh burst from her sad heart, but she went on), “by that cruel Ah! well, it will be the sooner over! If nobody, nobody at all, is left, who has compassion for me—perhaps it may not be so difficult to die, as I find it now!—But I tire you. Pray, Ma’am, excuse me,” (turning to Althea, with a half courtesy) “I am a poor miserable creature, without a friend left in the wide world.”

Althea was so affected that she could not answer her, otherwise than by turning to Mrs. Mosely, and begging her to sooth the poor girl rather than contradict her.

“Come, Phœbe,” said the old woman, “if you have been to the sea-side, you cannot desire, you know, to go again. You shall go and lie down upon my bed; for I am sure your head aches, and that you are tired. Come, be a good
good

good girl, and then you shall stay with me a day or two."

It seemed as if the unsettled mind of this unfortunate being was tremblingly alive to the voice of kindness; for without farther opposition she gave her hand to Mrs. Mosely, and suffered her to lead her out.

When she got to the door she turned towards Althea, and, with her head mournfully declined, sighed out, "God bless you, young lady!"

Mrs. Mosely returned in a few minutes.—"I've made her lie down," said she; "and perhaps she may forget herself while I make her a little tea, which is the only thing she will take."

"Let me assist you, my good woman," said Althea; "and do tell me who this poor young creature is, and by what misfortunes she has been driven to this pitiable state."

"Ah! dear Miss, it is a long story,
and

and you know old folks are apt to be tedious—it will tire you, I fear.”

“No, no—on the contrary, I shall not be easy without hearing it. Make her tea, and carry it to her. I will have some too, for I am fatigued this morning, and while she remains quiet you shall relate to me all you know of her. Just now there is nothing I would so willingly listen to.”

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